

# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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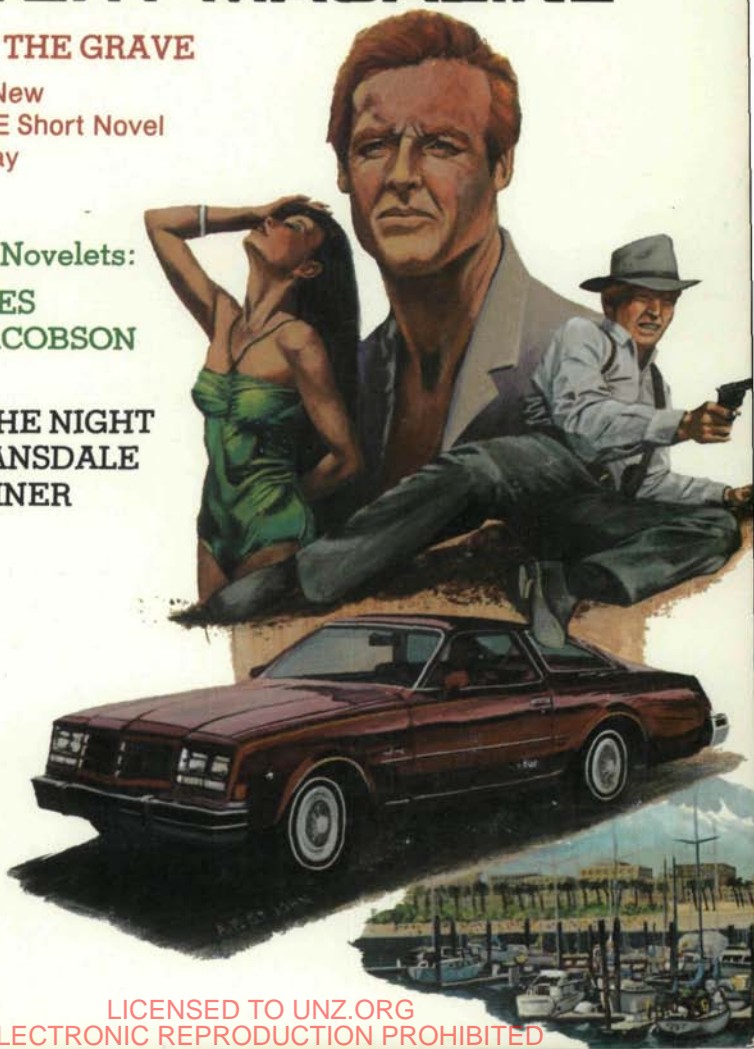
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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPT. 1979  
VOL. 43, NO. 9  
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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

### LADY FROM THE GRAVE by BRETT HALLIDAY

A woman who had died three years before walking around and causing trouble? If anyone else had made such a claim, Shayne would have scoffed. But when Lucy Hamilton insisted, the redhead knew he had a case to solve . . . . . 5

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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAKERS

JULIE SMITH lives in Berkeley, California, with a rare seventeen-pound cat. She works as a mild-mannered reporter for a metropolitan daily. Her favorite word is wombat.

Formerly an officer in the Mystery Writers of America, CHARLES E. FRITCH has written many stories in the field, including several paperback novels. He has also had published a considerable number of science-fiction stories, many of which have been anthologized in soft and hardcovers. In addition, he has sold to radio and television and comic books, written the definitive biography of actress Kim Novak, and has appeared in a science-fiction movie.

[Note: As the new editor of MSMM, I plan to use this page to let the writers tell you as much or

as little about themselves as they wish to. For example, I happen to know that Ms. Smith is also a member of MWA and has been secretary and editor of the Northern California chapter newsletter, and that Mr. Fritch has been known to buy comic books as well as sell to them. But why would I tell you things like that?]

Other hard information being short this month, I'll quote from a letter from JAMES M. REASONER: "The book review column by John Ball looks like a definite winner, and it's a very welcome addition. One thing I've often wondered about is why none of the mystery magazines have a Letters to the Editor column. I suppose the simplest answer is that they don't get enough mail. Maybe mystery  
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# Lady From The Grave

by Brett Halliday

It looked like a simple case of mistaken identity. Lucy unexpectedly met an old friend — and the records said that old friend was dead. Then someone tried to kill Lucy, and the case got complicated . . .

MIKE SHAYNE WAS on his feet like everyone else in the Orange Bowl, an intent expression on his craggy face. He and Lucy Hamilton, his brown-haired secretary and confidante, had fifty-yard-line tickets for this, the biggest game of the year. There were three seconds left to play.

On the gridiron below, the little foreign-born place-kicker of the Dolphins was lining up for a field goal attempt that, if successful, would win the game and bring the division championship back to Miami.

Lucy tugged at the redheaded detective's arm. "Michael," she said above the din of the crowd, "I know that woman."

The center was over the ball now. On the other side of Shayne, Tim Rourke, the lanky star report-

er of the *Miami Daily News*, was bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet and yelling, "C'mon! C'mon! Make it!"

Shayne was standing motionless and quiet, all his attention focussed on the field. He was at that moment unaware of both Lucy and Rourke.

The ball was snapped back to the holder and the kicker launched himself into his sidwinding soccer motion. All the noise in the stadium subsided suddenly, making the thud as foot met ball plainly audible.

The kick seemed to take forever to arrive, but when it did, it sailed cleanly through the uprights. No time was left on the clock, and the home team had won the championship.

Rourke was pounding Shayne on the back in delight, and Lucy was looking slightly mystified at all the commotion. Shayne's face had creased into a big grin, and he still hadn't acknowledged Lucy's comment.

"Man, it's times like this that I envy the sportswriters!" Rourke exclaimed. "Imagine getting paid to watch a game like that!"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "It was a damn good game."

Eighty thousand people were heading for the exits in the bright Sunday afternoon sunlight. Shayne fired up a cigarette and went on, "Why don't we wait until the crowd clears out?"

"Good idea," Rourke agreed.

Shayne swung his gaze over to Lucy, and for the first time noticed the distracted expression on her face. He asked, "What's wrong, Angel?"

"I tried to tell you earlier, Michael," Lucy said. "I know that woman over there." One of Lucy's slender fingers pointed.

Shayne followed her indication and picked out among the crowd, several rows away, a couple making a tortuous way through the press of people. The woman had dark hair, cut short around her head, and a face and figure that were very attractive. She would have drawn more attention if the man with her had not been such an overpowering presence.

He was tall, with broad shoul-

ders and strong features. A ring of gray hair ran around his head, and dark brows hooded his piercing eyes, but other than that, he was bald. Shayne thought he looked familiar, but couldn't place him.

"I think that's Janet Fulton," Lucy went on. "I went to high school with her."

Shayne drew on his cigarette, quirked an eyebrow and said, "So why not go say hello? Tim and I will wait for you."

"All right." Lucy moved off down the row, timing her arrival at the aisle so that she would intercept the couple. Shayne and Rourke stayed where they were, stepping back so that other fans could move past them.

Shayne's eyes followed Lucy through the mass of people. She had her purse clamped securely under her arm, but some pretty slick snatch artists worked these games and other sporting events. It wouldn't hurt to keep an eye on her.

Lucy got to the aisle just as the woman and her escort stepped up to that level. She put a hand out to stop the woman and said, "Janet Fulton! Hi, remember me?"

The woman gave a start and drew back. Frowning, she said, "Are you talking to me?"

"You're Janet Fulton, aren't you? I'm Lucy Hamilton. We went to school together. Don't you remember?"

"N-no, I don't. You've mistaken

me for someone else." The woman tried to move past Lucy.

Lucy put a hand on her arm, stopping her again. "Come on, Janet, you must remember me. We were both on the cheer-leading squad."

"No, I told you. *Please* leave me alone."

Lucy's pretty brow creased in a frown. "But —"

"Look, sister," the woman's escort said, anger making the lines of his face taut. "The lady told you to leave her alone. Now how about doing it?" He started to brush past Lucy roughly.

Shayne, even though he was unable to hear the words, had been watching the exchange closely. Now, as the big man bumped into Lucy, he dropped his cigarette butt and ground it out savagely with his heel. Two quick strides of his long legs brought him to Lucy's side.

Lucy saw the stormy expression on Shayne's face and said hurriedly, "Michael, you don't have to —"

Shayne ignored her protest and reached out. His strong, knobby fingers clamped down on the bald man's shoulder. He said, "*Hold* it."

The man swung to face him and said belligerently, "*Now* what?"

"You were a little rude to the lady, weren't you?"

"What the hell business is it of yours?"

Lucy said anxiously, "*Please*,

Michael, I don't want you to make a scene."

The other woman was standing by with a very worried look on her face. If, like Lucy, she feared a fight, there seemed ample cause for alarm. The two big men were facing each other jaw to jaw, and each was starting to clench his fists.

Rourke, looking amused, sauntered closer for a better view. Lucy took hold of Shayne's arm and said quickly to the other woman, "I'm sorry, I must have made a mistake. It's just that you look so much like a girl I went to school with. I didn't mean to annoy you."

The woman managed a weak smile. "That's all right. Anyone can make a mistake." She took hold of her escort's arm. "Please, let's go." She seemed to be in a hurry to leave.

The man glared at Shayne a moment longer before turning to leave. Shayne returned the look with equal ferocity.

When the couple had blended into the rapidly thinning crowd, Lucy said to Shayne, "*Honestly*, I wish you'd stop trying to defend me and getting into brawls."

"I can't think of a better reason," Shayne grunted. "Besides, that wouldn't have lasted long enough to be a brawl."

Rourke stepped up beside them and said, "I wouldn't bet on that, Mike. That bald-headed character could probably give you quite a tussle."



"You know him?"

"I know who he is. That was Garrett Jacobson."

"The real estate developer?"

"Right."

Shayne knew the name, if not many of the details. The impressions his memory dredged up were vague, but they identified Jacobson as a land speculator and developer with a hazy background. The redhead frowned and said, "Do I remember something about mob connections?"

"I seem to remember the same thing," Rourke answered. "I know he's got a reputation as a pretty good bare-knuckler."

Shayne put an arm around Lucy's shoulder and said, "Well, it's all over now, so I don't give a damn who he was. He shouldn't have been so rude to you, though, Angel, just because you made a mistake."

Lucy looked up at Shayne and said slowly, "That's just it, Michael. I *didn't* make a mistake."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that was really Janet Fulton. I went to school with her for nearly ten years. Her hair is different now, but she's the same person. When she spoke, I knew for sure. I remember her voice."

"Then why would she deny knowing you?" Rourke put in. "Maybe she just didn't remember you."

"She remembered me, all right." Lucy's voice was grim. "I

could see it in her eyes. And she was terrified because I remembered her!"

Shayne put a hand up and tugged absently at his left earlobe. "Maybe she was scared because you saw her with Jacobson. Do you know if she's married?"

"No, we've lost touch over the years," Lucy said. "I don't think I've seen Janet or heard anything about her in seven or eight years."

"And yet you picked her out of a crowd of eighty thousand people," Rourke said in skeptical tones.

Lucy was about to frame what probably would have been a tart reply when Shayne waved a hand and said, "Let's forget it. I thought we were supposed to go have some dinner."

Lucy looked anything but willing to forget the whole affair, but she allowed Shayne to take her hand and lead her toward the exit, Rourke tagging along behind. Much of the crowd had departed by now, and the three friends made their way out of the stadium and into the emptying parking lot.

They were walking down a long line of cars toward Shayne's Buick when some instinct sent tingles along the back of the detective's neck. Swiveling his head, he saw a big car come out of a gap behind them and turn in their direction. There were no other cars in the lane, and the vehicle fairly leaped toward them as the driver floored



the accelerator.

Shayne planted a hand on Rourke's shoulder and shoved violently as he yelled, "*Watch it!*" He grabbed Lucy's arm with his other hand and swung her to one side.

The shove had sent Rourke spinning away. He bumped hard into a parked car, but the moving vehicle missed him by several feet.

On the other side of the lane, Shayne pushed Lucy farther out of danger as the big vehicle swerved toward them. She screamed as the fender bore down on Shayne.

His muscles coiled and sent him into a leap onto the hood of a parked car. The other car roared on by. Shayne rolled off the hood, his fingers automatically diving under his coat and seeking the gun he had left at home. He remembered that fact with a curse.

The car made another turn and was suddenly out of sight. There had been no chance for Shayne to get the license number. In fact, it had all happened so fast that he had been able to get only a vague impression of the car itself.

Rourke was staring, his face livid. "That crazy bastard nearly ran us down!" he shouted. "Are you all right, Mike?"

Shayne brushed himself off. "I'm okay. How about you, Michael?"

Lucy had emerged from her place of safety between two parked cars. She said, "I'm fine, Michael. That must have been

some kind of madman. Imagine driving like that in a parking lot!"

"Yeah," Shayne agreed. "Imagine!"

The experience had shaken them, but all three had gone through much worse many times. Neither Rourke nor Lucy had seen the car well enough to identify it again. The incident appeared to be forgotten as they left the Orange Bowl and headed for dinner at one of Miami's fine restaurants.

*Appeared* to be forgotten, that is, except for the occasional glint in Mike Shayne's gray eyes.

## II

MONDAY MORNING had dawned clear and bright in Miami, and Shayne felt good as he sauntered into his office. Lucy was already at her desk. Shayne gave her a smile and tossed his hat onto the rack.

"How goes it this morning, Angel?"

"Quiet so far," Lucy replied. "I've been doing some thinking, Michael."

Shayne perched a hip on the corner of her desk and fired up a cigarette. He could tell by the expression on her face that she was serious, and he had known her long enough to have great respect for her opinions. He said, "About what happened yesterday?"

"Yes. I'm sure I wasn't mistaken, and I'm sure Janet was frightened when I recognized her. But

I haven't been able to figure out why."

"How well did you know Janet Fulton?"

"We were friends. Not close friends, really, but I saw her and talked to her every day at school."

Shayne stood up, stretching his rangy form, and said, "It could be she's married and the bald-headed guy wasn't her husband. He could be married to somebody else, too."

Lucy looked doubtful. "Who would have an illicit rendezvous at a football game?"

"Think about it a minute, Angel. Who pays any attention to what goes on in the stands, especially when a championship is on the line?"

"I suppose that's true."

"It was an eight-thousand-to-one shot that you saw her in the first place."

"Maybe so, Michael, but it still bothers me." Shayne could see determination in the set of her jaw as she spoke. "I think I'll call some friends of mine and see if they've heard anything about Janet recently."

Shayne opened the door of his inner office. "That's a good idea. Maybe it will ease your mind some."

He went on into his office as Lucy drew a small address book from her purse.

He walked to the window and looked out at Miami, narrowing his eyes slightly against the

glare of the morning sun. He hadn't told Lucy some of the thoughts that had been in his own mind since the incidents at the Orange Bowl.

In his many years as a private detective, Mike Shayne had been the target of numerous attempts on his life, too many to count. Experience and instinct combined to tell him that whoever was at the wheel of the car in the parking lot had been more than a reckless driver. It had been a deliberate attempt to run them down.

The motive behind it, however, was not so clear. There were plenty of people in Miami and elsewhere who wouldn't mind seeing Shayne dead. It was impossible to be an honest private eye without making enemies.

On the other hand, it could be that the parking-lot incident was tied to the encounter with Garrett Jacobson and the mystery woman Lucy felt certain was Janet Fulton. Shayne couldn't see any reason for attempted murder in that, though.

He was currently at liberty and the bank balance was healthy. Shayne frowned and tugged at his left earlobe. Unless Lucy came up with something that cleared this odd business up, he decided to look into it himself.

He had just reached that decision when the door to the outer office opened and Lucy came in, a puzzled expression on her pretty face. Shayne swung around to

ward her and said, "What is it, Angel? Did you find out something?"

"I only had to make one call," Lucy said with a slight tremor in her voice. "I called Julie McKenzie. She's a flight attendant based here in Miami, and I happened to catch her at home. We were in the same class, and she was a cheerleader, too."

"Did she know anything about Janet Fulton?"

"Yes." Lucy swallowed. "She told me Janet has been dead for three years."

Shayne stared. Lucy went on, "Julie said Janet and her husband were lost at sea in a boating accident. But I saw her, Michael! I know that was her!"

Lucy had turned pale. Shayne stepped over to her and put his big hands on her shoulders. "Take it easy," he said softly. "You must have been mistaken. I know you think that woman was your friend, but —"

"But *nothing, damnit!*" Lucy said. The profanity told Shayne how upset she was. "I know who I saw."

"All right." Shayne took a deep breath. "What else did your friend have to say?"

"She told me that Janet married a man named Fred Logan. He had a successful construction business, and he and Janet were on a vacation in the Bahamas when the accident happened."

Lucy paused for a moment,

then went on. "They went out in a rented boat, just the two of them, and they didn't come back on time. A search party found an oil slick and some debris. The authorities said there must have been an explosion."

"What about the bodies?"

"They were never found."

Shayne ran a thumbnail along the line of his jaw. After a moment of thought, he said, "Then it's possible Janet Fulton didn't die. The woman you saw could have been her. But remember, Angel, despite what you think, it is possible you were mistaken."

Shayne saw the stubbornness that lit up Lucy's eyes and held up a hand to forestall her protest. He said, "You've got me curious, though. How about if I check things out, since we're not working on anything else right now?"

"Would you, Michael?"

"Sure. If I don't, you're going to be too upset to get any work done around here."

She put a look of mock anger on her face and said, "Oh, is that so?"

"Yeah." Shayne sat down at his desk and pulled the phone toward him. "Now scoot out of here so I can get busy."

She left the room with a grateful smile as Shayne dialed the number of the City Room at the Miami *Daily News*.

Tim Rourke wasn't there, but his editor told Shayne that the bony reporter was expected back

momentarily. Shayne said, "Thanks," and hung up.

He went into the outer office and said, "I'm going over to the paper and talk to Tim. I want to find out some more about this Garrett Jacobson. And I'd like to talk to that other friend of yours, Julie McKenzie. You think I could still catch her at home?"

"You might. She said she was on a second day of a two-day lay-over. She's flying out for Chicago tonight."

"Give me the address and I'll run by there after I talk to Tim."

Lucy read off the address of Julie McKenzie's apartment and Shayne copied it down in his notebook. And he did so, he thought he detected a slightly strained note in Lucy's voice. He said, "Is something else wrong?"

"No, it's just that . . . Well, you watch yourself with Julie. She was my friend, but that didn't stop her from stealing the captain of the football team away from me!"

Shayne was able to hold back the laugh, but couldn't suppress a big smile that spread across his rough-hewn face. "It sounds as if I should watch Julie instead of myself," he added.

"She was a knockout even in high school." Lucy sighed. "Too much competition for me."

Shayne, looking more serious, leaned over Lucy's desk, put a hand under her chin, and tilted up her head. "Nobody can

compete with you, Angel," he said, then pressed his lips to hers.

They were both smiling when he left the office.

IT TOOK ONLY a few minutes to drive to the *Daily News* building. Shayne parked his car and took the elevator up to the City Room. When he walked into the big, bustling room, his gray eyes picked out the scarecrow thin figure of Tim Rourke standing by the water cooler.

The reporter tossed back a cup of water as Shayne approached. The redhead said, "I thought you never touched the stuff."

Rourke donned a solemn expression and announced, "I have gone on the wagon for good. Too many mornings after. What brings you to this journalistic cesspool?"

"I need some information."

"That's one thing I've got plenty of. Come on."

The two of them crossed the room to Rourke's desk. As Rourke settled down behind it, Shayne picked up a spare chair, swung it around backwards and straddled it. He pushed his hat back atop his red head.

"Lucy's still bugged about what happened yesterday," he began.

"You mean about that ruckus at the stadium?"

"Yeah."

"I've been thinking about that myself, Mike. You figure that business in the parking lot was

deliberate?"

"It could have been." Shayne lit a cigarette and dropped the match into an overflowing ashtray on Rourke's desk. "It wouldn't be the first time somebody has tried to run me down. What I'm wondering is whether I was really the target this time."

Rourke's thin face creased in a frown. "You think they could have been after Lucy?" His tone was incredulous.

"You weren't the intended victim. After I shoved you out of the way, the car swerved toward Lucy and me. It could just as easily have been her they were after."

"But *why*? Just because she saw somebody she thought she knew?"

"She still insists that woman was Janet Fulton." Shayne took a deep drag on his cigarette. "And Lucy found out something this morning that opens up interesting possibilities."

"What's that?"

"Janet Fulton is supposed to have died in a boating accident in the Bahamas three years ago."

Rourke sat up. "*Supposed* to have died? Are you thinking . . .?"

Shayne shrugged. "I don't have enough information to do anything except recognize a few possibilities. That's where *you* come in."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Find out as much as you can about Garrett Jacobson. I want to know what he's been involved

in and what he's got on the burner now, if anything."

Rourke shook his head. "You'd better be careful, Mike. If some of the things I've heard about Jacobson are true, he's the type to pull almost anything."

"Just get me some facts," Shayne said, standing up. "Can you have what I need by lunch time?"

"I can try."

"How about if we meet at the Beef House at twelve-thirty, then?"

"Okay by me. What's next on the agenda for you?"

"Lucy called another old friend of hers named Julie McKenzie. That's how we found out about the boating accident. I thought I'd pay Miss McKenzie a personal visit and ask her some questions."

"Would this Julie McKenzie happen to be attractive?" Rourke asked.

Shayne smiled again. "Lucy told me to watch out for her."

"Oh-oh!"

Shayne just kept smiling, waved, and walked out of the City Room.

### III

THE ADDRESS Lucy had given him turned out to be that of a new and expensive apartment highrise not far from the Bay. The basement garage was for tenant parking only, so Shayne left his Buick on the street and strode into the spacious lobby. A bank of mailboxes on one wall told him that

J.L. McKenzie lived in Apartment 424, and a self-service elevator took him up to the fourth floor.

He paused in front of the door to 424 before knocking and listened. The driving beat of disco music came from within. Shayne rapped his knuckles on the door with enough force to be heard over the music.

A few seconds went by and Shayne was about to knock again when a female voice called from within, "*It's open! Come on in!*"

He swung the door open to reveal a woman dancing energetically to the music on the living room carpet. She wore a white terry-cloth top and pink running shorts that revealed sleek, well-tanned legs. Her blonde hair was tied back in a ponytail, and her attractive features looked very serious as she concentrated on her movements. A fine sheen of perspiration covered her brow.

"Morning workout," she explained. "Got to keep the figure in shape."

There was nothing wrong with her figure that Shayne could see, and the brief outfit revealed plenty of it for inspection. He said, "Are you Julie McKenzie?"

"That's right." She flung her hips from side to side as the record on the stereo came to an abrupt end. She padded across the room on bare feet to shut the unit off, then said, "Who are you?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. You know my secretary, Lucy

Hamilton."

Julie McKenzie smiled. "So you're the famous Mike Shayne. I had heard Lucy worked for you. I can see why she would like the job."

Shayne brushed past that and said, "I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes, if you don't mind."

"Not at all. Can I get you a drink? It's a little early in the day for me, but if you'd like anything . . .?"

"No thanks."

Julie sat down on the sofa and patted the cushion beside her. Shayne gave a mental shrug and accepted the invitation.

"I'll bet this is about Janet Fulton," Julie said. "I was certainly surprised when Lucy called earlier and asked about her. I hadn't even talked to Lucy in . . . oh, hell, nearly four years."

"How come the two of you didn't keep in closer touch?"

"Just too busy, I guess. I was based in Atlanta for a long time, while Lucy was in New Orleans, and when we both came back to Miami, we just never did get together. You know how it is."

She was leaning toward him, and Shayne was aware of the warmth of her body. She was still a little out of breath from her exercising, and her high, full breasts were rising and falling less than foot away from him.

It wouldn't hurt to put this meeting on a more businesslike basis, Shayne decided. He pulled

his notebook out of his pocket and said, "What can you tell me about Janet Fulton?"

"Lucy didn't tell me what this was all about. Are you working on a case that involves Janet?"

"Right now, it's just a routine investigation." Shayne doubted that she would buy that stale line. He had seen too much intelligence and curiosity in her eyes for that.

"I'll bet!" Julie sounded cynical. "If you don't want to tell me, though, that's all right. I suppose it's your business."

She leaned back and stretched her bare legs out in front of her. "I'll tell you what I know about Janet," she replied. "She and Lucy and I all went to school together, and after graduation, Janet and I became stewardesses. She quit a couple years later to marry a man named Fred Logan. He had a construction business in Atlanta, and they met on a flight."

Julie shook her head, frowned then continued. "He was pretty rich and successful, and he could afford things like a vacation in the Bahamas. That's where they were when their boat blew up."

"You and Janet seem to have stayed in touch fairly well," Shayne commented.

"Well, we *had* worked together. It was natural for us to keep in contact with each other."

"Were she and Logan happy together?"

"They seemed to be."

"You said the accident was three years ago?"

"Yes." She gave him the exact date and he made a note of it. "That's why I don't understand why you're asking questions about Janet now."

Shayne considered telling Julie what lay behind the investigation, then decided against it. Not knowing any more than he did, he decided it would be smarter to keep the background to himself.

He couldn't help but notice that Julie's eyes were a deep sea blue as he asked, "Did you know Fred Logan?"

"Yes, I-I knew him."

The brief stumble told Shayne that there was something there worth knowing. He said quickly, "What did you think of him?"

Julie's features had tightened somewhat. She said, "He had a reputation with the girls. I guess you could say that he was a man a girl couldn't turn her back on safely. At least that was the way he was until he met Janet. After they started going together, I never heard any more talk about him."

Shayne still sensed that Julie knew more than she was telling. He was about to ask another question when she suddenly said, "This is all ancient history, Mike. I've always been more interested in here and now."

She shifted on the sofa so that a bare thigh was pressing against his leg. As she leaned over even



closer to him, he felt her breasts against his arm.

"Yes, indeed," she added, "I imagine Lucy really *does* love her job." Then her arms went around his neck and pulled his head to hers.

Her lips were warm and pliant, and the long kiss sent Shayne's pulse kicking into high gear. Even as he was enjoying it, though, he was mentally chuckling in remembrance of Lucy's warning. It appeared that her concern had been justified.

Shayne allowed his arms to go around Julie for a moment and crushed her to him. She writhed in passion, her hands running up and down his back, and then Shayne broke the kiss.

"Lucy told me you liked football captains," he said. "She didn't mention anything about private eyes."

Julie's eyes widened. "You mean she still remembers —"

Shayne released her and stood up abruptly. "Thanks for the information, Miss McKenzie. If I need anything else, I'll be in touch."

He walked to the door rapidly as Julie watched him, open-mouthed. As soon as he was out in the hall and had the door closed behind him, he heard a four-letter word explode within the apartment. Then the disco music came back on, louder than ever, as he moved away down the hall.

Chagrined, Shayne shook his head. Calling a halt to the action on the sofa had not been easy, but under the circumstances, he wouldn't have felt right letting it go any further.

Julie McKenzie probably knew more than she told him, but he wasn't going to bed with her just to get information. He would go on with the other phases of the investigation before getting back to the beautiful blonde flight attendant.

Shayne strolled back down the street to the Buick. It was too early to head for his meeting with Tim Rourke at the Beef House, so he drove toward Flagler Street and his office.

As he passed through the Miami streets, his eyes automatically checked the rear-view mirror from time to time. Being habitually alert had saved his life on many occasions through the years. Even things he took no conscious notice of registered on his brain.

That's how he became aware of the dark blue Ford that had been behind, always two cars back, for several blocks. He put on his brakes, made a sudden right turn onto a side street. He kept his car's speed the same.

Shayne hoped that the turn hadn't been abrupt enough to reveal his awareness of the tail. He wasn't ready to lose whoever it was that was following him.

The Ford, tires squealing slightly, made the turn, too, but now that there were no cars in between to act as a screen, it began to hang back. Shayne peered intently into his mirror, trying to read the license number, but it was too far away.

Suddenly, the Ford made another turn, a left this time, and disappeared. Shayne glared and muttered, "*Damnit!*" He hit his brakes and turned the Buick around in the alley, but he knew it was a futile attempt. The Ford would be long gone before he could get back to the street it had turned on.

He was right — the Ford was nowhere to be seen. He had hoped to learn the identity of whoever was following him, but they had been too cautious.

Shayne frowned and tugged at his ear. The car that had nearly run them down at the Orange Bowl had been a dark color. More than that Shayne couldn't say, and he was not about to form any definite conclusions based on such shaky evidence.

Still, he kept a closer eye on the mirror as he made his way back to the office, arriving there a few minutes later.

#### IV

LUCY WAS typing up some correspondence when he came in. She paused as he hung his hat up and asked, "Did you find out anything, Michael?"

He smiled, "I found out that Julie McKenzie is quite an interesting girl."

Lucy's mouth tightened and she went back to her typing, pounding furiously at the keys.

"Hey, come on, Angel!" Shayne laughed. "I'm only kidding. Seriously, she only told me about the same thing she told you. I got the feeling she knew something else about this Fred Logan, but she wasn't ready to spill it. She seems like a pretty smart gal, even if she is a little predatory."

"Julie was always good in school," Lucy said grudgingly.

"Don't worry about it," Shayne said. "You've got her beat all the way around."

"It's nice of you to say so, Michael, but I really don't mind that she's so beautiful and appealing. She is still beautiful and appealing?"

"Very?" Shayne said with a smile.

Lucy looked for a second as if she wanted to throw the typewriter at him, so he hurried on, adding, "I've got Tim checking out Jacobson. I'm meeting him at The Beef House at twelve-thirty. This Fred Logan Janet married came from Atlanta, so I may do some calling over there. And I can check with the authorities in the Bahamas about the accident."

He went on into the inner office and Lucy went back to her typing. A few minutes later, she put her head in the door and said,

"Would you like some coffee, Michael?"

"Sure, that would be fine, Angel." Shayne was sitting behind his desk, doodling on a pad and thinking.

"I'll bring you a cup," Lucy said.

When she returned a few moments later, carrying a steaming mug of coffee, Shayne was still behind the desk, a thoughtful expression on his craggy face.

Lucy leaned over and put the cup on the desk. Shayne reached up and drew her head down to his for a quick thank you kiss.

The window behind them shattered with a crash.

Shayne took it all in instantly — the shattered window, the whine of the slug, the *plunk* as it buried itself in the far wall. All these things imprinted themselves on his brain in the split second before he catapulted out of his chair.

Yelling, "Down!" he wrapped an arm around Lucy and they both went to the floor. A shard of glass sliced a narrow gash on the heel of Shayne's left hand.

Lucy lay huddled beside him. He could feel the pounding of her heart against his ribs. She said, "Michael . . ."

"Just lie still and stay as flat as you can," he told her. "The bullet hit the wall directly opposite the window, which means the gun is on the same level we are. We're out of his line of fire down here."

Several minutes dragged by without another shot, then Shayne said, "You stay right here."

"What are you going to —"

Before Lucy could finish her question, Shayne had rolled away, drawing his pistol from his shoulder holster as he did so. When he was clear of the window, he came up into a crouch.

Holding his gun at the ready, he hazarded a glance out the window and saw nothing but the office building across the street. There was no doubt that the shot had come from there, but the gunman could be gone by now. Even if he hadn't fled, he could have stashed his rifle somewhere and blended into the background.

"Stay low and go into the outer office," Shayne told Lucy. "Call the cops and tell them what happened."

"What are you going to do?"

"Pay a visit across the street."

Shayne was out of the office before Lucy's protest was half-formed. He was down the stairs, through the lobby and out in the street, striding purposefully, before a minute had ticked by. His face was set in hard lines of anger.

He pushed through the doors of the other office building and quickly located the office of the building manager. His knuckles pounded sharply on the door, and then he swung it open without waiting for a response.

A portly, balding man looked up

from a cluttered desk with an annoyed expression on his face. He snapped, "Yes? Who the devil are you?"

"I'm the guy who just got shot at from your building," Shayne snapped back. "Have you rented any offices out today?"

The manager looked alarmed. "What are you talking about? I can't give out information about our tenants!"

Shayne leaned over, resting his scarred knuckles on the desk. "Listen!" he said savagely. "Somebody on the second floor of this building just tried to blast me with a high-powered rifle. Now answer my question!"

"I-I'm going to call the police . . ." the manager quavered.

A new voice came from the doorway. "Don't bother. We're already here."

Shayne turned to see Detective Lieutenant Matt Sullivan of the Miami Police. Behind him were two uniformed officers. Sullivan went on, "Your secretary told us you'd be over here, Shayne."

"You made good time."

"Happened to be in your neighborhood. Don't you get tired of people shooting at you?"

"Extremely."

Sullivan turned his attention to the building manager. "I believe Mr. Shayne here asked you a question. Why don't you answer it?"

"But I can't reveal information about our tenants," the manager

protested. "It's against company policy."

The detective-lieutenant joined Shayne in leaning over the desk. "Surely you could make an exception this once."

The manager's eyes flicked back and forth between the two big men hovering over him. He swallowed nervously and said, "Well . . . we did sign a new lease just this morning."

"A new tenant?" Shayne asked.

"Yes. A company called Alpha Imports."

"Just what do they import?"

"Why, I never asked."

Sullivan said to the redhead, "You think somebody rented an office here just to take a shot at you, Shayne?"

"What say we take a look at it and see what we can find?"

What they found was an empty office, directly across the street from Shayne's. The manager didn't like it, but he let them in with his passkey. There was no indication that the office had been occupied.

"This had to be where the shot came from," Shayne said, "But when the bastard missed, he didn't stay around for a second shot."

"Okay, Shayne, we'll take it from here," Sullivan said. "We'll run a check on this Alpha Imports outfit."

"Don't be surprised if you don't find anything, Matt."

"I won't be. This looks like a

professional job, and those boys know how to cover their trail."

Shayne left the detective-lieutenant in the office talking to the manager and went back down to the lobby. A gold-plated plaque beside the front doors caught his eye, and he paused long enough to read it. It informed him that the building was owned by something called Omega Investments.

Lucy was sweeping up the broken glass from the office floor when he came in. He said, "You don't have to do that, Angel."

"I don't mind. Matt Sullivan was here."

"I know, I saw him across the street."

"He took the bullet out of the wall."

Shayne saw the hole gouged in the wall where the bullet had been removed. He went over to it and sighted back over an imaginary line of fire. It led directly to the office that had been rented by Alpha Imports. He could see Sullivan and the other cops moving around over there.

Lucy, standing beside the desk, suddenly straightened from her cleaning and her head blocked his view. Shayne's mind flashed back to the way things had been just before the shot. Lucy had been standing in the exact spot. She had put the coffee on the desk, and then he had pulled her head down for a kiss.

Shayne felt icy fingers clutching at his heart.

The shot had been meant for Lucy.

## V

SHAYNE CAME into The Beef House a half-hour later, needing a drink.

He hadn't explained to Lucy what he had figured out, but he had sent her home to her apartment with firm orders to stay there and not to let anyone in but him. She hadn't liked it, but she was willing to go along with his wishes.

Tim Rourke was waiting in his usual booth. Shayne slid onto the seat opposite him and made a signal to the bartender. A healthy glass of Martell arrived moments later.

"You look shaky, Mike," Rourke said as Shayne downed half the drink.

"Somebody tried to put a high-powered rifle slug through Lucy's head less than an hour ago," Shayne told him. "How *should* I look?"

"*What!*" Rourke exploded. "Is she okay?"

"Yes, but it was only luck that saved her. There's no getting around it now, Tim. Somebody's after Lucy, and it has to be because of what happened after the game yesterday."

Rourke looked worried. "You think it's Jacobson?"

"I'd say he's a good bet. What did you turn up on him?"

"There aren't any definite mob connections, just hints and whis-

pers. He started in land development about ten years ago on a minor scale and kept building up. He's made and lost a couple of fortunes along the way."

"Any trouble with the law?"

"A few fights in bars back in the old days. He's been sued a couple of times for land fraud, but he can afford good lawyers. He's always won the cases."

Shayne finished his drink. "A pretty shady operator, right?"

Rourke nodded. "He's a plunger, a wheeler-dealer. He'll sink everything he's got into a deal."

"Does he have anything going on right now?" Shayne asked, lighting a cigarette.

Rourke nodded. "He's going to build a resort hotel and some condominiums on one of the Keys. It's a small one, and Jacobson bought the whole island. Work is supposed to start on it soon."

"Has he got a lot sunk in it?"

"Nearly all the available assets of his company, Omega Investments."

Shayne's eyes widened and his fingers tightened on his empty glass. "Jacobson owns Omega Investments?"

"Right . . . say you look like that hit a nerve."

"Whoever took that shot at Lucy used an office across the street. Omega Investments owns the building."

Rourke uttered a low whistle. "I'd say that ties Jacobson in neatly."

Shayne's bushy eyebrows drew down into a frown, and he tugged absently at his left earlobe. "Do you know where this Key is that Jacobson owns?"

"Yeah. What's on your mind?"

"I might take a run down there this afternoon and check it out."

Rourke told him the location of the Key and then Shayne asked, "Did you find out anything else about Jacobson?"

"Just that he's got one weakness besides land speculation."

"What's that?"

"One he shares with you and me. Beautiful women."

That reminded Shayne of his morning visit with Julie McKenzie. He filled Rourke in quickly on what he had found out about Janet Fulton.

When he had finished, Rourke asked, "Do you figure the accident was a phony?"

"It could have been. See what you can find out about this Fred Logan she was married to."

"Okay. You want me to call you?"

"No, I don't know where I'll be. I'll get in touch with you."

The two men ordered their lunch then, but while Rourke's voracious appetite was undiminished, Shayne had trouble finishing his steak. He was still too angry and upset about Lucy being the target of a would-be murderer.

When the meal was over, Shayne was about to make his

goodbyes when he realized something he had been too disturbed to notice earlier. He saw that Rourke was drinking again.

"I see you fell off the wagon," Shayne commented.

The lanky reporter grimaced. "Those wagon rides are too damn bumpy," he said. He swallowed some of the amber liquid in his glass. "Ah . . . Smooth sailing."

Shayne allowed himself a half-smile as he left The Beef House.

He pointed the nose of his Buick south and headed out of Miami. It would take about forty-five minutes, he estimated, to reach the key where Garrett Jacobson planned to put his resort development.

It would have been a pleasant drive under other circumstances. The Keys, many of them lush with tropical vegetation, were separated by stretches of brilliant blue water. Causeways spanned these stretches, some of them several miles long. It had been a while since Shayne had been in the Keys, and he wished he was in more of a mood to enjoy the scenery.

He slowed down as he approached his destination. As he came off the causeway, he pulled the Buick to the side of the road and came to a stop, pausing to consider the little island.

It was a little over a mile long and about half a mile wide. The highway bisected it almost evenly.

Wide sandy beaches ran around the edges, and the interior was grassy, with a few shrubby scattered palms. As far as Shayne could see, construction work had not been started. In fact, the only sign of life on the otherwise deserted island was a small shack, set well back off the highway. A narrow dirt track led out to it.

Shayne turned the Buick onto the trail and drove toward the shack. The road, if such it could be called, had not been made for a big car like the Buick. Shayne decided to park it and go the rest of the way on foot.

The shack was old, its wooden planks weathered almost pearl gray by years of salt water and wind. Shayne walked around it once. It had probably been built as a bait stand for fishermen in an earlier day, he thought.

He could stand in one spot and see the whole key, but there was little to see but sand and grass and water. There was no evident motive for attempted murder here.

Shayne was about to head back to his Buick when another car came off the causeway and turned onto the little dirt trail. It pulled up behind the Buick, effectively blocking it.

Shayne planted his feet, waiting for whatever might come. His hand slipped inside his coat and his fingers wrapped around the butt of his gun.

He would not have been sur-



prised if the other car had been a dark blue Ford. Instead, it was a canary yellow Mercedes. Its door opened and a tall, broad figure got out. Garrett Jacobson's bald head gleamed in the sun.

"Who the hell are you?" he barked as he walked toward Shayne. Recognition flared in his eyes as he came closer. "You are the bastard who tried to start a fight at the game yesterday!"

"The name's Mike Shayne," the redhead browsed.

"The private eye?"

"That's right."

"Well, you're trespassing on private property, Shayne. I'm Garrett Jacobson, and I own this key. Now how about getting your butt off?"

"I know who you are, Jacobson." The fingers of Shayne's left hand bunched into a fist. "Do you also own a dark blue Ford? And how about a high-powered rifle?"

Jacobson's florid face looked confused. "I don't know what you're talking about, Shayne. I don't own a rifle or a Ford."

"Where were you a little after eleven o'clock this morning?"

"In a meeting at my office, if it's any of your damn business."

Shayne returned his scowl. "It doesn't matter. You could have hired your dirty work done."

The muscles along Jacobson's jaw rippled as he stepped closer. "Shayne, I don't know what in

hell you're talking about, but I'm tired of listening to it. I think you're just a natural-born trouble maker, and I don't like trouble makers!"

Jacobson launched a wild punch at the detective's head that Shayne blocked easily. The redhead was about to start his counterattack when he gasped suddenly and staggered backward. Jacobson's feint had worked, and the land speculator's other fist had gone piledriving into Shayne's stomach.

Shayne recovered his balance just as Jacobson dived after him with a flurry of punches. Shayne blocked most of them, but he took a couple of hard blows to the body.

All his anger came boiling out then. He threw a feint of his own, then sent a hard right crashing through Jacobson's guard. It caught the land developer on the chin and made him take steps backward before he sat down suddenly. A thin line of blood trickled down from his mouth.

"Is that enough, Jacobson?" Shayne asked, trying to catch his breath.

Jacobson rubbed his sore chin and said, "Hell, no. I bit my tongue!" He came up off the ground and lunged at Shayne again.

Shayne missed with a left hook and then Jacobson rammed into him, wrapping strong arms around

him and bearing them both down. His arms tightened as they rolled on the ground, and Shayne wondered how long he could stand the bear hug before his ribs cracked.

He drove the heel of his hand up into Jacobson's chin as hard as he could, and blood spattered again. Jacobson yelled in pain and fury, and his grip loosened momentarily. Shayne seized the opportunity and jabbed a stiff hand into the other man's solar plexus.

Jacobson grunted and his arms came loose: Shayne rolled away, heaving to his feet as soon as he was clear. Jacobson was struggling to get up, too, and Shayne could have easily kicked him in the head with a large Irish foot. But it had never been his style to fight that way, and he wasn't going to start at this late date.

He waited until Jacobson had regained his footing, shaken his head to clear the cobwebs, and then the battle was joined again. Shayne made sure he didn't let Jacobson get close enough to try another bear hug.

Mike Shayne had traded punches with some pretty tough bruisers over the years, but Garrett Jacobson was one of the best. The two of them slugged it out for long minutes, and both of them were on the receiving end of blows that would have floored a lesser man for the count. It was only Shayne's relative youth and the fact that his profession kept him in better shape that finally allowed him to

gain some ground.

A straight left to the body, followed by a looping right, finally did Jacobson in. He went sprawling on the sand, and when he tried to get up, all he could do was fall back and gasp. Blood covered most of his face.

Shayne stepped back and drew in several big lungfuls of air. When he had caught his breath to a certain extent, he rasped, "I don't know what you're afraid of, Jacobson, but I don't like being shot at. And I sure as hell don't like my secretary being shot at."

Jacobson raised up slightly on one elbow. "I don't know what you're talking about. Why have you got it in for me?"

"Think about it, Jacobson. My secretary recognizes the woman you were with yesterday, and a few minutes later, a car tries to run us down. This morning somebody follows me around while I check on the woman, then later a slug nearly takes our heads off. Now you show up here. The conclusions seem obvious."

Jacobson spat blood on the ground and said, "I had nothing to do with any of that. This is the first I've heard of it. Shayne, I don't give a damn who saw me with Angela Farley, and who's got a better right to be here than me? I own this land!"

"Wait a minute. Who's Angela Farley?"

Jacobson managed to sit up.

"The woman at the game with me. She's a secretary, too, and it was just a casual date. I certainly wouldn't have killed over her."

Shayne backed off as Jacobson got to his feet. He didn't know whether to believe the big man or not. His words had the ring of truth, but Shayne had know many accomplished liars. And there was the Omega Investments tie-in to consider, too.

"Move your car and I'll get out of here," he said, "but don't think for a second that I'm buying your story. I promise you, Jacobson, if anything happens to Lucy Hamilton, I'll be coming for you, and I won't stop until you're cold meat."

"Yeah, and I'll remember you, too, Shayne," Jacobson growled as he hobbled back to his car.

Shayne climbed into his Buick while Jacobson backed the Mercedes out of the highway. The developer parked on the side of the road and watched with a dark scowl on his face as Shayne drove by him.

Shayne had just as dark a scowl on his own face. The trip to the key had been a waste of time and worse. All it had really netted him was bruises . . . plus the name Angela Farley. He would have to check that out as soon as he got back to Miami.

He hoped there was still enough time for another visit to Julie McKenzie before she left for Chicago. He couldn't shake the feeling that

the blonde knew more about Janet Fulton's history than she had told him earlier. She might be ready to talk by now. He hoped so. After the attempt on Lucy's life, the redhead was in no mood for any further stalling around.

Mid-afternoon traffic was light on the highway. Shayne drove smoothly and effortlessly, letting his mind roam freely as it tried to untangle the intricacies of the puzzle that faced him. He was still convinced that the key to it all was the woman Lucy had seen at the stadium.

If Angela Farley were really Janet Fulton, come back from the grave, there had to have been a good reason for her supposed death. Shayne wondered briefly about her husband. He had been a successful man and, presumably, a wealthy one. Assuming that the boat explosion was a fake, could it have masked some kind of murder plot? Or was the plan for Fred Logan also to resurface with a new identity?

Shayne shook his head. He would have to assemble more information before he could fit the whole thing together. If Julie McKenzie wouldn't tell him what he needed to know, then some phone calls to Atlanta would be in order, unless Tim Rourke came up with something.

Again it was habit and instinct that alerted Shayne. His eyes flicked to the mirror and noticed a car coming up fast behind him. As it

got nearer, he realized with a start that it was a dark blue Ford. If Jacobson was indeed behind the trouble, he had worked fast.

The Ford closed the gap between them rapidly, even though Shayne tromped down on his own accelerator. The other car had to have a souped-up engine, Shayne reflected grimly, and the timing of the attack had been perfect. The Buick had just sped onto the longest causeway in the trip, and now Shayne was faced with nearly three miles of two-lane road with nothing past either guard rail but water. There was no place to go but straight ahead.

Shayne slipped his pistol out of its holster and laid in on the seat beside him, where it would be handy. The Ford was only about a quarter of a mile behind now, and he wasn't surprised when he heard the *spang* of a bullet ricocheting off the Buick's rear end.

There was no oncoming traffic in the other lane, no other traffic on the bridge at all that Shayne could see. That was a stroke of good luck. He sawed the wheel back and forth, sending the Buick swerving madly from side to side in hopes of avoiding the bullets. There was still an occasional hit, and he was praying that none of the slugs found the gas tank or a tire.

A bullet suddenly punched a hole in the back window and whined by Shayne's head before going

on through the windshield. They were coming too close now, and there was no way Shayne could drive and return the fire at the same time. There had to be two men in the pursuing car, one to handle the wheel, the other to handle the gun.

There was still well over a mile to go before the causeway ended, and Shayne accepted the cold realization that he would never make it this way. He would have to strike back somehow if he ever wanted to reach land again. As it was, he was a sitting duck and the causeway was a shooting gallery.

He tried the old ploy of switching his lights on, but the driver of the Ford didn't fall for it. He realized that Shayne hadn't hit his brakes and maintained the pressure.

Shayne was coaxing every bit of speed that he could out of the Buick, but it wasn't enough. There was only one thing left to do.

He hit his brakes for real this time. The tires of the Buick screeched and smoked as the car began to fishtail. The driver of the Ford had no choice but to follow suit.

Shayne kept applying the brakes and spun the wheel to the right. The rear end of the Buick slewed around into the other lane, trying to get ahead of the front end. Shayne held his breath as the grille scraped along the guard rail.

The Ford stayed in a straight line. When Shayne's Buick finally

came to a stop, it was crosswise, blocking both lanes of the road. It was only luck and exceptional brakes that kept the Ford from plowing into it. Instead, the smaller vehicle came to a stop less than five feet away.

Almost before the Buick stopped moving, Shayne grabbed his gun and rolled out of the door. He crouched, using the bulk of the car for cover, and began snapping shots at the Ford.

The driver leaped out, firing wildly at Shayne, and the redhead calmly squeezed off a shot that took the man in the body and sent him sprawling on the concrete.

The gunman on the passenger side was more cautious. He came out of the car low, using the open door as cover, and his accurate shots had Shayne diving for cover of his own.

It looked like a Mexican stand-off. Shayne had three shots left in his gun, and he wanted to make them count. He doubted that he would have a chance to reload.

Crouching low, he peered underneath both cars and spotted a foot. He chanced a shot and missed, but it came close enough to make the gunman jump. Shayne straightened and triggered his next-to-last shot at the now-visible enemy.

That one missed, too, and Shayne felt the wind of a slug whipping by his head. They were both in the open now, though, and Shayne coolly fired his last bullet

before the gunman could pull trigger again.

This one found the park.

The man dropped his gun and staggered backward, a red flower blooming in the middle of his chest. The guard rail caught him in the back of the knees and he cartwheeled over it, spinning down to land with a splash in the ocean fifty feet below.

Shayne stood at the rail and looked down grimly at the floating body for a moment. The other man was lying motionless in a pool of blood next to the car. Shayne had been damned lucky, and he knew it.

With a weary sigh, he went back to the Buck and began trying to raise the State Police on the radio-telephone.

## VI

IT WAS LATE afternoon by the time Shayne got back to Miami. He was tired, having told his story to a State Police Captain half a dozen times. He had omitted Garrett Jacobson's involvement, though, pinning the blame for the attack on anonymous old enemies. If there was one thing Shayne had plenty of, it was old enemies.

His first stop was Lucy Hamilton's apartment house near Biscayne Bay. He left the Buick on the street and walked up to her rooms on the second floor.

Shayne rapped on the door and called. "It's me, Angel."

There was no response for a moment, then Lucy's soft voice came through the door, "Michael?"

"That's right."

He heard the sound of the chain lock being taken off, and then the door swung open. Lucy stepped back to let him come inside. She wore a soft blue dressing gown that went well with her dark hair and fair skin.

She looked at him for a moment as he dropped his hat on a table, then asked, "What happened?"

"How do you know anything happened?"

"I know *you*, Michael. Besides, you've got bruised knuckles and you look ready to chew nails. Would you like a drink?"

Shayne nodded and said, "You should work for a detective." He sank into her overstuffed sofa while she poured a drink from the supply of Martell she always kept on hand for him.

He sipped from the glass she handed to him and said, "I talked to Tim about Garrett Jacobson, that bald character we saw at the game. Jacobson is going to build a resort development on one of the Keys, so I drove down to check it out. I ran into the man himself, and we got into a little scuffle."

Lucy sat down beside him and put a hand on his arm. "I know how your little scuffles usually go, Michael."

"Yeah, well, this one wound up just about a draw."

"Did you find out anything

about Janet?"

"Jacobson claimed that the woman with him was a secretary named Angela Farley."

"Michael, I *know* that was Janet Fulton —"

"Whoa, Angel! I agree with you. I think that boat explosion was a phony, but I'm still in the dark about why it happened and why Jane resurfaced in Miami with Garrett Jacobson, calling herself Angela Farley. If I can come up with something on this husband of hers, Fred Logan, maybe that will give me some answers."

Lucy moved closer and put her head on his shoulder. "Something else happened, didn't it?"

Shayne took a deep breath. "Two bastards tried to kill me on the way back to town. They chased me on a causeway. There was quite a bit of shooting."

Lucy sat up sharply as he spoke, her eyes widening. "Are you all right?" she asked. "Were you hurt?"

Shayne shook his head. "Not a scratch. Unfortunately, I had to kill both of them. I would have liked to ask them some questions about who they were working for."

"Do you know who they were?"

"No. The State Police are working on that now. I'll have to call them later and see if they've identified the bodies."

Lucy shuddered. "Do you think it was one of them who shot at you earlier?"

Shayne stood up abruptly and jammed his hands in his pockets, scowling. Lucy had a right to know, but that didn't make it any easier. "Angel," he said tightly. "that sniper wasn't shooting at me. He was shooting at you."

Lucy's smooth brow wrinkled. "Shooting at me? But why?"

"Because you saw that woman with Garrett Jacobson and recognized her as Janet Fulton. That makes you a threat to somebody. I don't know if it's Jacobson or Janet or someone else."

Lucy had turned pale. "Michael . . . that car in the parking lot —"

"Was probably another attempt," Shayne finished. "And now that I'm looking into it, they won't be satisfied until we're both dead. That's why it's very important for you to stay here. Don't go near the windows, and don't go to the door unless you're sure it's me. I'll call Will Gentry and ask him to have a man keep an eye on the place."

"And what will you be doing while I'm hiding out here?"

"I'll be trying to get to the bottom of this mess."

"I thought as much," Lucy said sharply. "How do you think that makes me feel?"

Shayne reached out and stroked her cheek with a tenderness he rarely allowed to show. "I'm sorry, Angel," he said, "but it goes with the territory."

He finished his drink, then picked up his hat and jammed it back

on his head. With a slight smile, he said, "Don't worry, Angel. I'm sure I'll be safe enough where I'm going next."

"Where's that?"

"Julie McKenzie's apartment."

He slipped out the door before Lucy could throw anything.

He used the pay phone in the lobby of Lucy's building to call Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry. He quickly explained the situation to the bulldoglike chief. When he had finished, Gentry said, "I'll alert the patrolmen in that area, Mike. They'll be on the lookout for anything unusual. I'm sorry I can't put a man full time on Lucy's apartment, but I'm just too damn shorthanded."

"I understand, Will," Shayne said. "I'll appreciate whatever you can do."

"Keep in touch. And try not to shoot up any honest citizens."

"Right." Shayne hung up and went out to the Buick cautiously.

It didn't take long to get to Julie McKenzie's apartment. He hoped he could catch her before she left for the airport.

The same elevator took him up to the fourth floor. When he paused in front of the door to 424 this time, there was no sound of disco music. Shayne lifted his hand and rapped his knuckles on the door.

After a moment's interval, Julie's voice came from the other side of the door. "Who is it?"

"Mike Shayne."



"Oh?" She sound surprised.  
"Just a second. I'm not dressed."

When she opened the door a few minutes later, Shayne stepped inside and eyed her appreciatively. She wore a thin powder-blue robe that gaped open at the top and ended at about the same point her thighs began. Her blonde hair was loose now and fell around her face to her shoulders. The ends of it were damp.

"I was taking a shower," she explained. "I really didn't expect to see you again today, Mike."

"I wanted to talk to you again. I'm glad I caught you before you flew out."

"Oh, I don't have to be at the airport for another two hours." She took a step closer to him. "Plenty of time to . . . talk."

It appeared that she wasn't going to give up. Shayne put his hands on her shoulders, pulling her to him. His mouth came down hungrily on hers.

She responded eagerly, pressing her warm, nearly nude body against him. He held her tight for a moment, then broke the kiss and growled, "Damnit, *this* isn't why I came here."

Her gown was gaping even more now. "Are you *sure* you want to talk?" she asked softly.

"Well, since somebody is trying to kill me and you may be able to tell me why, I think talking might be more important."

She stiffened in his arms. "Somebody's trying to kill you?"

"Yeah. I was nearly run over yesterday and shot at today. So you can see why I'm more interested in information than I am in your charms, lovely as they are."

He released her and she stepped away from him, visibly shaken by what he had told her. She shook her head and said, "I'm sorry, Mike, but I don't know anything about this. I don't see how I can help you."

"You can help me by telling me everything you know about Janet Fulton and her husband, Fred Logan."

"I told you this morning —"

"I know what you told me. I want more." Shayne's tone was grim and demanding.

Julie paced across the room, closing the robe and tightening the belt. She had a worried look on her face. "I don't like to speak ill of the dead," she began. "That's why I didn't say anything about it this morning. And as far as I knew, you already knew about it."

"What are you talking about?"

"I think Fred was in trouble with the law just before they were killed. I don't know what it was all about — I had already been transferred out of Atlanta by then. It was just an impression I got from Janet's letters. Fred was in trouble, and it was going to get a lot worse."

"But you don't have any idea what it was about?"

"No. Maybe if you called someone in Atlanta . . ."

"I've got a friend of mine checking that out through his newspaper connections. Sorry I had to come down so hard on you."

She turned to face him. "That's all right, Mike. I understand." She moved closer to him again. "I - I really *do* like you. But I guess stealing one fella from Lucy is enough."

Shayne took her hand. "It's too bad things aren't different. But thanks anyway for telling me what you know."

"I'm sorry it wasn't more helpful. Honestly, Mike, I never dreamed that anyone was trying to kill y —"

The window behind her, covered with filmy curtains, shattered. Julie lurched forward against Shayne, her mouth opening in a silent scream. Shayne's arms went around her automatically, and he felt wetness on her back that wasn't caused by a shower.

He went to the floor, taking Julie with him, as more bullets came zinging into the room. There was a heavy glass ashtray on an end table nearby. Shayne grabbed it and flung it upward, smashing the overhead light and plunging the room into a twilight dimness.

"Oh...Mike...Mike," Julie moaned. The shooting stopped.

Shayne held her tightly and said, "Don't worry. You'll be okay."

He felt a shudder run through her as he held her. There had been no shots for almost a minute, and

Shayne began squinting into the shadows, trying to find the telephone.

When he located it on another end table, he said to Julie, "You lie still. I'll get help."

Her breathing was harsh and labored in the now-quiet room. Shayne jerked the receiver up and hurriedly dialed the Miami emergency number.

He quickly gave the address and situation, and the voice on the other end assured him that an ambulance and the police were on their way. He hung up.

A glance through the broken window showed nothing out of the ordinary. The rifleman would be gone by now. Shayne heard a siren begin to wail somewhere in the gathering darkness.

Julie coughed and whispered, "Mike? . . . Hold me again."

He knelt beside her and cradled her in his arms. "This is my fault —" he began bitterly.

"Oh . . . hush," she cut him off. "That Lucy . . . really is . . . a lucky girl . . ." Her eyes closed and her head slid down against his shoulder.

When the police and ambulance crew arrived minutes later, Shayne had Julie's body lying on the sofa, covered with a blanket from the bedroom. They took one look at Shayne's face, full of anger and frustration and ready to explode, and decided it would be better to leave him alone for a while.

Will Gentry was on his way, and he could have the job of talking to the redheaded private detective.

## VII

"WE COULDN'T FIND any trace of the gunman, Mike," Gentry told him a half-hour later. "I'm sorry."

The beefy, red-faced police chief was standing in the middle of Julie McKenzie's living room, his usual well-chewed stump of an unlit cigar in his mouth. Shayne was standing with his back toward Gentry, hands jammed in his pockets.

Julie's body had been taken away, but Shayne could still see how she had looked both in life and death. Gentry cleared this throat and asked tentatively, "Do you think they were after you or the girl?"

"Doesn't matter," Shayne rasped. "They could have been afraid Julie knew something damaging, or they could have been aiming at me. They could have been after both of us."

"In light of this, I'll keep a man as close to Lucy's as I can."

"Thanks, Will. I'll be going over there myself a little later."

"By the way, Mike, I got a report from the State Police about those two creeps who tried to waste you on the causeway. They were a couple of contract killers out of Detroit. It looks like they

were imported especially for this job."

"Whatever is behind this, the stakes are high," Shayne said. "Somebody has so much money riding on it, they'll go to any lengths to get their way." Shayne tugged at his earlobe and looked thoughtful.

"Like Garrett Jacobson. His resort development will be a multi-million dollar deal. He probably can't afford to have it fall through. Why Janet Fulton's resurrection is a threat to him, though, I don't know."

"We'll be talking to Jacobson very damn shortly," Gentry promised.

Shayne swung around to face him, eyes blazing. "Let me talk to him first, Will!"

Gentry hesitated. "Well, I don't know, Mike. This is police business now."

"A little time is all I'm asking, Will. You can question him later. I just want first crack at him."

The chief looked dubious. "How do I know you won't take the law into your own hands?"

"Have I ever?"

"More times than I can count."

Shayne's gaze was cold and unsmiling as he looked at Gentry. There were deep hollows in his cheeks. "That girl died in my arms, Will," he said. "I think I deserve this favor."

"Oh, hell! All right. But Jacobson had better stay in one piece."

"He will. I'll go see him as soon

as I've talked to Tim."

"Somebody mention my name?" Rourke said from the doorway. "I got over here as soon as I heard about it, Mike. Howdy, Will."

Shayne lit a cigarette and said, "I'm glad you're here, Tim. What did you find out about Fred Logan?"

"Plenty. Lucy's friend didn't show very good judgment in choosing a husband. Logan was a successful contractor, all right, but he made his money by cutting corners, sometimes dangerously," Rourke said.

"His buildings were unsafe?" Shayne asked.

"Damn right. He was in trouble constantly with building inspectors, but he always got around it. OSHA was on his back, too. But the big crunch took a while to catch up to him."

"What happened?"

"Right after he and Janet left for that vacation in the Bahamas, a building his company had built collapsed. The investigation showed that the collapse was due to unsafe materials and shoddy workmanship."

"Was the building occupied?" Gentry queried.

Rourke's lean face was solemn as he nodded. "It was a senior citizens' apartment house. Thirty-four old people died."

"Damn!" Shayne breathed.

"If that boating accident was a fake, Logan had a hell of a reason

for setting it up. There were murder charges against him, Mike."

Shayne dragged a thumbnail along his jaw. "Do you know what happened to Logan's money, Tim?"

"Nope. But I'll bet most of it was stashed in safe deposit boxes."

"If the Logans set themselves up in new identities, they wouldn't want anyone uncovering that." Shayne was silent for a moment, thinking, then he asked Rourke, "Can you get me some photos of Logan and Janet, Tim?"

Rourke grinned. "Got 'em already, from an old Atlanta paper. I thought you might want them. They're down in the car."

Shayne turned to Gentry. "I'm going to see Jacobson now, Will. Give me a little while, all right?"

"Okay," Gentry said grudgingly. "Like I said, though, you behave."

"Don't worry, Will. I don't think I have any argument with Jacobson."

"I thought you said he was trying to have you killed!"

Gentry's comment went ignored by Shayne. The detective was propelling his rangy form out of the apartment in a hurry. Rourke tagged along behind.

Shayne paused on the street only long enough to take the pictures of Logan and Janet from Rourke. The photo of Janet showed a younger woman with longer

and lighter hair, but there was no doubt in Shayne's mind that the woman in the picture was the same one they had seen at the Orange Bowl. He said as much to Rourke.

"I think so, too," the bony reporter replied. "It would take an old friend like Lucy to spot it immediately, but when you look close there's no mistaking it."

"And this is Fred Logan," Shayne mused, studying the picture under the dome light of Rourke's battered old Ford. The man in the picture was in his late thirties, with a narrow, pinched face and sleek dark hair.

"Right. You look like you've got this whole thing figured out, Mike."

"Maybe. I'm hoping Jacobson can confirm my suspicions."

"Care to tell me about it?"

"Don't worry, Tim. You'll get your story. Here's some of it you don't know about."

In a few terse sentences, Shayne outlined the afternoon's activities, including the fight with Jacobson at the key and the deadly gunfight on the causeway. Rourke pulled his notebook out and scribbled it all down in his own peculiar shorthand.

"Damn," he said, "you've had a busy day, Mike."

"And it's not over yet," Shayne rejoined. "I'm going to see Jacobson now."

"Care for some company? I know where the so-and-so lives."

Shayne considered it for a moment, then nodded abruptly. "Come on."

They went in Shayne's bullet-holed Buick, the detective following Rourke's instructions on how to find Jacobson's house. It took them nearly twenty minutes to get there.

The house was large, set back off the road behind a lawn dotted with palm trees. A high iron fence ran around it. Shayne pulled up in front of the closed gate and leaned on his horn. There were lights in the house, but there was no response to Shayne's summons.

"How strong does that gate look to you, Tim?" Shayne asked.

"Now wait a *minute*, Mike. You're not thinking of —"

Shayne already had the Buick in reverse and was backing up in order to get some room. When he was a hundred feet away, he slammed the transmission back into Drive and floored the accelerator. Rourke wailed a vain protest as the vehicle leaped forward.

Shayne's face was set in determined lines as they sped toward the gate. He was thinking of how close Lucy had come to death and how Julie McKenzie's face had been, so white and still, as he cradled her in his arms — the face of a ghost in the shadowy room . . .

The Buick hit the gates with a crash, springing them open. Shayne kept the accelerator down and sent the car roaring up the drive.

He skidded to a stop in front of the house. More lights had come on inside, and the front door opened violently as the Buick stopped. Garrett Jacobson came storming out.

"*Damnit, what is this?*" he shouted.

Shayne stepped out of the car. Jacobson recognized him and rumbled, "*Shayne!* I should have known it was you, you big dumb —"

He broke off suddenly as Shayne's arm came up and he saw the gun that the detective held casually in his big fist. Shayne said, "Don't push me, Jacobson. I'm starting to think you're in the clear on this, but I still don't like you!"

"Mike," Rourke said worriedly from the other side of the car, "are you sure this is a good idea?"

"Take it easy, Tim. I'm not going to hurt anybody . . . yet."

"Just what the hell do you want?" Jacobson demanded, some of the bluster coming back into his voice. His face was bruised from the afternoon's encounter with Shayne.

"I just want you to look at some pictures," Shayne said.

"Pictures? I don't want to look at any pictures. How about if I just call the cops?"

"They'll be here soon enough. And they'll probably ask you the same questions I'm going to. Now, why don't we go in the house?"

Jacobson still looked belligerent, but he said, "Well . . . all right."

The three of them went into the house and entered a luxuriously furnished living room. Shayne pulled the photographs from his pocket and held them out to Jacobson. "Take a look at these and tell me if you know these two people," he said. He still had his gun out.

Jacobson took the pictures and studied them for a moment with a glare on his face. Then he began to look puzzled and said, "They both look familiar, but I don't know who they are."

"Concentrate on the woman."

Jacobson frowned. "Is it . . . could it be Angela Farley? The hair is all wrong, but there's a resemblance."

"Her name is Janet Fulton. She's supposed to have died three years ago in the Bahamas, but she didn't. Now she calls herself Angela Farley. You said she was a secretary. Whose?"

"She works for Frank Daniels —" Jacobson broke off abruptly and held up the picture of Fred Logan. "That's who this is! His hair is gray now and he's put on some weight, but this is Frank Daniels."

"You're sure of that?" Shayne asked.

"I'm certain of both of them."

"And Daniels is the contractor for your new development, right?" Shayne guessed.

"He's going to be, as soon as we sign the contracts tomorrow."

"Holy *Toledo!*" Rourke exclaimed.

"Will one of you tell me what this is all about?" Jacobson demanded.

Shayne slipped his gun back into its holster. "Just how much do you know about Frank Daniels?" he asked.

"Not a hell of a lot. His company turned in the lowest bid. He's not a local man, though. He's from Tampa."

"And Atlanta before that," Shayne said. "His real name is Fred Logan, and he used to be in the construction business in Atlanta. I wouldn't sign any contracts with him if I were you."

"Why not?"

"Because a building he built fell down and killed thirty-four people. He was wanted for murder before he conveniently 'died' in an accident."

"My God!" Jacobson said. "And to think this is the biggest project I ever attempted. How do you know all this? Can you prove it?"

"We can prove it. The woman is Logan's wife. My secretary recognized her yesterday and started the whole thing."

"His wife! But I thought —"

"You were after her for yourself, weren't you? And Logan probably would have thrown her in with the deal if it was necessary. Tough luck, Jacobson." Shayne

turned on his heel and stalked toward the front door. On his way out, he said, "When the cops get here, explain it all to them."

Rourke hurried outside after the detective. The piled back into the now-dented Buick. As Shayne started the car and drove down the driveway, the lanky reporter bubbled, "What a *story!* Logan must have been at the game yesterday, too, and he saw Lucy recognize Janet."

Shayne nodded. "That's the way I figure it. He didn't want there to be any chance of their true identities being revealed, especially before the contract with Jacobson was signed. So he came after us in a car, hoping to pass it off as an accident. When that didn't work, he imported some talent to silence Lucy. When I started investigating, my name went on the list, too."

"Logan wanted that contract with Jacobson bad, didn't he?"

"Bad enough to kill for it," Shayne said, thinking of Julie.

They rode in silence for a moment, as both of them lit cigarettes. The Rourke asked, "What are you going to do now?"

"I'll drop you off at your car and then head for Lucy's place. I want to stick close to her until Logan's rounded up. I'll call Gentry from there and make sure he has the whole story."

"Forget the car," Rourke said. "Just drop me off at the paper. Typewriter, here I come!"



## VII

SHAYNE LET ROURKE off at the Miami *Daily News* building, then pointed the Buick toward Lucy's apartment. It had been a long day and a tiring one, and it would feel good to relax. He would explain the case to her, and then they could put on some music and break out the brandy and get ready for some rest and recuperation . . .

The flashing red lights put an end to those thoughts.

There were several police cars parked in front of the building where Lucy lived. Some uniformed officers were standing around on the sidewalk in front of the door. As he wheeled the Buick toward the curb, Shayne tried to tell himself that they weren't necessarily there because something had happened to Lucy. But he didn't believe a word of it.

He parked the car and hopped out, striding purposefully toward the building entrance. One of the uniformed officers noticed him and moved to block his path.

"Sorry, sir, you can't go in there," the cop said, trying to sound official. He was extremely young, Shayne saw, and he carried himself with an arrogant swagger. Shayne disliked him on sight. Under the circumstances, he was in no mood to put up with him.

"I've got business in there," the redhead grated. "Get out of my way."

The other officers moved closer, and Shayne recognized a couple of the older ones among them. The young patrolman, highly conscious of the crowd of curious onlookers, had appointed himself the spokesman.

"Why don't you just move along?" he asked.

Shayne tried to keep a rein on his temper as he said, "I might consider it if you tell me what's going on in there."

"If it's any of your business, a girl's been kidnapped."

The blood in Shayne's veins turned to ice. In a low voice, he said, "It's my business." He started to brush past the young officer.

The man grabbed at his pistol and started to say, "Hey, you can't do —"

Shayne's temper flared. His left hand shot out and clamped down on the young cop's wrist, freezing the pistol halfway out of its holster. The redhead's other hand balled into a fist and sank itself into the officer's belly. He gasped and doubled over. The crowd of onlookers echoed the gasp.

The other policemen had tensed, drawing their guns. Shayne cursed himself for his impulsive action. He released his grip on the young officer and said to one of the men he had recognized, "Come on, Jack, you know me. I'm Mike Shayne. I'm afraid it's my secretary that's in trouble."

"I'm afraid you're right, Mr. Shayne," the cop called Jack said. "But the chief gave us strict orders no one was to go in or out."

"Gentry's in there?"

"That's right."

Shayne stepped back and raised his voice. In a bull-like bellow, he called, "Hey, Will! Get your butt out here!"

The cops all looked shocked, but a moment later the front door opened and Will Gentry rumbled, "What the hell's going on out — Mike! Don't just stand there," he ordered his men. "Let this man through!"

Shayne stalked up to Gentry and said in a low, intense voice, "What's happened, Will?"

"Come on up to Lucy's apartment, Mike." Gentry's face was a grim mask.

They trooped up the stairs together. Gentry said, "I've been trying to get hold of you. I came over here as soon as I heard about it. A disturbance call came in from one of the neighbors, but by the time the patrol car got here, everybody was gone."

They entered Lucy's apartment and Shayne felt his guts begin to churn. The place was in disarray, lamps and chairs overturned. It appeared that Lucy had put up a struggle.

Photographers and evidence technicians were busy in the room, plying their trades. Gentry motioned to one of them, and the man came over, carrying a piece of

paper. Gentry took it from him and handed it to Shayne. "We found this," he said. "Don't worry; it's already been fingerprinted."

Shayne scanned the note quickly. The message was printed in square letters with a felt-tip pen. It read; *Mike Shayne — We have your secretary, but no harm will come to her if you do as we say. Leave Miami. Do not contact the police. Do not investigate. When you return in forty-eight hours, Miss Hamilton will be released safely.*

There was no signature.

"Damn him!" Shayne said softly, with hate in his voice. "He doesn't know the game is already up. It's all for nothing."

"Jacobson?" Gentry asked.

"No. Fred Logan, alias Frank Daniels."

"Don't you think it's time you filled me in on what you know, Mike?"

Shayne sighed and complied with Gentry's wish. He quickly outlined everything that had happened since the day before, complete with the conclusions he had come to.

"I was going to let you boys wrap it up for a change," he said. "I was going to come back here and stay with Lucy while they rounded up Logan. But I was too late. Logan still thinks he has a chance. He doesn't know we've got it all figured out."

Shayne stalked over to a window and glared out at the Miami night.

He lit a cigarette and took a deep drag on it. It didn't help to steady his nerves any.

In a tight voice, he said, "Logan wants me out of town so he can go ahead and sign the contracts with Jacobson. But he still won't be safe then, not as long as anyone knows his secret. He'll have to kill Lucy, if he hasn't already, and he'll have to kill me. All he wanted to do with that damn note was slow me down a little."

Gentry moved over and put a hand on his old friend's shoulder. "You know we'll do everything we can to find her, Mike. Do you have any idea where they might have taken her?"

The grim-faced detective shook his head silently.

"Look," Gentry went on, "I know better than to suggest that you go home and get some rest, but try to take it easy. It won't help Lucy for you to go storming around like a wild bull."

Shayne shook Gentry's hand off. "What do you expect me to do?" he demanded. "Stand around twiddling my thumbs?"

Gentry was silent for a moment, then said, "No, Mike. You do what you have to do."

Shayne crushed his cigarette out in an ashtray and stalked over to the door. He paused before going out, and his eyes locked with Gentry's for a second. They shared an unspoken message of concern, then Shayne scowled and hurried on out.

He brushed through the policemen downstairs and pushed past the knot of onlookers. Returning to his Buick, he started it and sent it roaring down the street.

He didn't know where he was going, but just then he couldn't stand still. Movement at least gave him the illusion of something being accomplished.

As he drove through the Miami streets, Mike Shayne's keen mind automatically began to consider the problem at hand. He tried to think of the kind of place that the kidnappers would have taken Lucy. It would have to be somewhere quiet and isolated, somewhere they wouldn't be seen.

There was no way to be sure how well Logan knew the Miami area. Since he was originally from Atlanta and was now headquartered in Tampa, it was likely he wasn't too familiar with Miami and its environs. If there were some place he was familiar with that would fit the qualifications. . .

Shayne exclaimed, "Dammit!" and hit his brakes. He was going in the wrong direction. He executed a neat U-turn and headed south.

The key on which Garrett Jacobson had planned to develop a resort community fitted the bill. It was lonely and isolated, and it had the little shack on it.

It was only a hunch, but over the years Shayne had learned how to tell which hunches were worth following. He floored the acceler-

ator and headed for the Keys.

The forty-five-minute drive seemed like an eternity to Shayne. He had never been one to indulge in ifs, maybes or might-have-beens, but now he was cursing himself for not sticking closer to Lucy. He clenched his jaw and shook his head to drive out visions of what might already have happened to her.

When the Buick finally sped onto the final causeway before it reached its destination, Shayne reached down and switched off the headlights. A bright moon was floating overhead, and there was plenty of light for him to negotiate the causeway.

He braked smoothly as he came off the bridge, not wanting any squeal of tires. Pulling the Buick over to the shoulder, Shayne slipped out quietly without shutting the door. Sounds could carry a long way in the still night air.

The shack was about a quarter-mile away. Shayne thought he could detect a faint glow in one of its windows, but he couldn't be sure. His eyes could be playing tricks on him, or it could be just wishful thinking.

All the chambers in his pistol were full. He gripped it securely in one hand, held the flashlight from the car's glove compartment in the other. Moving stealthily in the moonlight, he advanced toward the shack on foot.

He took his time approaching the building. If Lucy were still

alive and in there with her kidnappers, it was vital that he not alarm them. Taking them by surprise would give Lucy the best chance to come out of this alive.

When he got closer, Shayne saw that there was a dim light inside the shack. Placing his feet carefully, he slipped next to the building, a foot away from the window.

Moving by fractions of inches and with an easy grace that belied his big rugged appearance, Shayne slid along the wall of the shack until he could sneak a glance through the broken window.

There was no electricity in the shack, but a kerosene lamp sitting on a rough wooden table provided the scene with flickering illumination. Shayne held his breath as he took it in.

Lucy was sitting in a straight chair on one side of the table. There was a small bruise on her face, and her dress was partially ripped off one shoulder, but other than that, she appeared to be unharmed. Her face was set in tight lines, and her brown eyes were flashing with anger. She wasn't tied up.

On the other side of the table in another straight chair sat a big man Shayne hadn't seen before. His ruddy face was topped by sandy hair, and his suit coat stretched over broad shoulders that bulged with power. A .45 automatic lay on the table in front of him within easy reach.

Shayne knew the type — hired

muscle. The man was probably a compatriot of the two who had attacked Shayne on the causeway earlier in the day. He would be just as quick to shoot if it became necessary.

There was no one else in the shack's one room. Shayne wondered where Fred Logan was.

Lucy suddenly said, "You won't get away with this."

The man chuckled. "So you keep telling me, lady. Believe me, I'll get away with it. That's my job."

"Then it's a filthy job," Lucy snapped. "Kidnapping innocent people!"

"Sometimes it ain't much fun." The man shrugged. "But it's not often I get to grab a girl as pretty as you."

Shayne could feel anger boiling around inside him, but he wanted to keep a tight rein on his temper for as long as possible. He needed to know if Logan were anywhere around.

Inside the shack, the gunman had stood up and was moving around the table. He reached out and ran blunt fingertips down Lucy's cheek, then cupped her chin and tilted her head back roughly. "I don't know when Logan will be back," he said. "No reason we can't pass the time more enjoyably."

Lucy's eyes flicked to the gun he had left lying on the table, and in desperation, she lunged for it.

The man reached back and

slapped a big paw down on the gun before Lucy could reach it. He laughed. "I don't mind you fighting, but no guns." He grabbed her arm and pulled her roughly to her feet.

Shayne had seen and heard enough. His lips drew back in a grimace of rage. He spun away from the window, dropped into a crouch, and was about to launch himself at the shack's flimsy door.

A voice from behind yelled, "*Hold it!*"

Shayne whirled, his gun coming up. Headlights washed over him, their glare hitting him directly in the face. Blinded, he fired wildly in the direction of the voice and the lights.

Shots came back at him. Shayne knew he had to move. He leaped to his right.

It was like leaping into a brick wall. He slammed into something, something that grabbed his gun hand and twisted. It had to be the man from inside the shack.

Shayne lashed out with the flashlight he carried in his other hand and felt it connect with something with a thud. The grip on him loosened and he tore out of it.

His vision was coming back now, and he saw Lucy standing wide-eyed in the doorway. She was looking over his shoulder at something behind him, and she screamed, "*Michael — look out!*"

Something crashed into the back of his head, sending him staggering toward her. Pinwheels of light

whirled in front of his eyes. He tried to regain his balance, but the same something hit him in the head again.

It was like sliding down into a deep, dark well. He collapsed at Lucy's feet, out cold.

## IX

SHAYNE DIDN'T know how long he had been unconscious, but it didn't seem long. When he climbed up out of the well and regained consciousness, he found himself seated in the chair Lucy had been in earlier. His hands were tied securely behind his back.

There was an ache in his head and his vision was blurred as he looked around the room. He shook his head from side to side, trying to get the cobwebs out.

As his sight cleared, he saw that Lucy was standing beside him, an expression of extreme concern on her face. He forced his lips to a smile and said, "I'm okay, Angel."

"You won't be for long, Shayne."

Shayne turned his gray eyes toward the new voice and got his first look at Fred Logan in the flesh.

There was a resemblance to the man in the photo Rourke had provided, but as was the case with his wife, it would take an old friend or some close study to recognize him. His face was fuller, his hair a different color.

Janet Fulton Logan, aka Angela Farley, stood beside her husband. She looked upset, with good reason. Logan and the other man, who stood close to Shayne, both had pistols out.

Logan spoke sharply to his henchman. "You're lucky we got back whe we did, Leo. Shayne would have taken you."

"Nah, boss," Leo denied. "I could have taken care of him."

"Well, there's no point arguing about it now. You'll get to take care of both of them." Logan turned his attention to Shayne. "I'm certainly glad you thought of this place, Shayne. You saved us the trouble of coming after you."

Shayne glowered and rasped, "You'd better give it up now, Logan."

The contractor laughed. "Why, for God's sake? You and this lovely secretary of yours almost ruined the best deal of my life, but it's over now."

"Is it?" Shayne asked. "Are you sure Lucy and I are the only ones who know your secret?"

"Oh, hell, don't try to pull that tired old stuff, Shayne!" Logan sounded confident, but Shayne could see traces of worry creeping into his eyes.

"Will Gentry and Tim Rourke know the whole story," the red-head stated. "Are you going to kill them, too? And Garrett Jacobson knows. If you get rid of him, that would be killing the goose with the golden egg, wouldn't it?"

Janet put a hand on her husband's arm and said tensely, "Maybe we should forget it all, Fred, and get out of here. We started over once — we can do it again."

"No!" The cocky smile had dropped off of Logan's face. "We can get through this. Nobody can prove anything. It's their word against ours, and they're not going to be around to do any talking."

Logan slipped his gun back into a shoulder holster. He took a thick envelope from inside his coat and slapped it down on the table. "Here's your money, Leo. Wait until we're gone, then take care of both of them. After that, you can go home."

Leo picked up the envelope lovingly. "Thanks, Mr. Daniels. You don't have to worry about a thing."

"I hope not."

Janet was biting her lower lip. She started around the table and said, "Lucy, I'm so sorry —"

Lucy cut her off with a chilly, "Forget it, Janet. You forgot everything else about the way you used to be."

Logan took Janet's arm. "Come on. Let's get out of here."

The two of them left the shack. Shayne heard their car leave. That improved the odds. He had hope now, even though he was unarmed and his hands were tied.

Leo sauntered around the table, putting the envelope of money in

his pocket. He smiled and said, "Well, it's just the three of us now." He looked meaningfully at Lucy. "Pretty soon, it'll just be the two of us."

"You pig!" Lucy spat at him.

"Hey, like I said, doll, I don't mind you fighting." He took a flask from his hip pocket and drank a long swallow from it thirstily. When he took it away from his mouth, he said, "And then when it's all over, we'll take a little trip out on the causeway and give the fishies a treat."

Shayne kept his voice level as he said, "Considering the circumstances, could I have a drink of that?"

Leo looked at the flask. "A last drink? Yeah, sure, why not?" He leaned over the table and handed the flask to Lucy. "Give him a drink. Then we'll get this show on the road."

Lucy tilted the flask and let a little of the fiery liquid trickle into Shayne's mouth. Shayne licked his lips and said, "Kiss me, Angel." She leaned over and kissed him for a long moment, then clasped his neck in a brief hug.

Leo said cynically, "How touchin'. Come on, doll, he's had his drink and his kiss. Now move away from him."

Lucy turned and said, "All right." Then she flung the contents of the flask all over him, just as Shayne had told her to do in a whisper.

Leo yelled and started to bring



his gun up. Shayne launched himself out of his chair, overturning the table. The kerosene lamp fell against Leo.

The lamp shattered and Leo screamed as the flames ignited his liquor-soaked clothes. He got off one wild shot before he became a staggering, blazing torch.

Shayne kicked out, knocking the gun from Leo's hand. Lucy was screaming. The spilled and burning kerosene had set the walls on fire, and the dry, weathered wood was going up like tinder. Shayne shouted at Lucy, "*Get the gun!*"

"Michael —"

"*Get the gun!*" he thundered. "*We've got to get out of here!*"

She scooped the gun off the floor as a shrieking Leo blundered into the burning wall. He was trying to beat the flames out with his hands.

Shayne yelled, "*Let's go!*" He followed close behind Lucy as she dashed out the door. Flames singed his eyebrows.

They ran out into the night and stopped about twenty yards away from the blazing shack, drawing in deep breaths of blessedly cool air.

"Michael," Lucy panted, "we can't just leave him in there!"

The screams had stopped. Shayne said, "There's nothing we can do for him now, Angel. Get my knife out of my pocket and cut me loose."

When she had done that, he took the gun from her and said, "Let's get back to the car."

They started trotting toward the Buick when headlights came speeding over the causeway. The car screeched to a stop behind Shayne's car. The readheaded detective growled, "*Dammit! I was afraid Logan would see the fire and come back.*"

He pulled Lucy over into the shadow of a stumpy palm tree. They watched as Logan leaped out of his car and came racing toward the shack. He shouted, "*Leo! Leo, are you all right?*"

Shayne whispered to Lucy, "I'll try to draw him off. You stay here until I've got him away, then make a run for the Buick and use the radio to call the cops."

"I understand. Be careful, Michael."

"You be careful. Janet's still up there, so you'll have to watch out for her."

"I can handle Janet," Lucy said grimly.

Shayne left the cover of the tree in a crouching run. Logan was still circling the shack, calling Leo's name. Shayne ran toward him, and when he thought he was close enough, yelled, "*Logan! Over here!*"

Logan turned and snapped a shot in his direction. Shayne turned and ran toward the water, with Logan following.

It was an eerie chase through the moonlit sand dunes. The light made accurate shooting difficult except at close range, and Shayne wanted to make sure Logan was

well away from the cars before he took any chances.

Slogging through the sand was slow going. When Shayne thought he had covered enough distance, he turned and threw himself down behind a dune. Logan was about twenty yards behind. Shayne squeezed off a shot at him.

It was a miss, but it came close enough to make Logan flop behind a dune of his own. He triggered two shots that dug furrows in the sand close to Shayne.

The two of them traded shots for several minutes. It was a stalemate, but that was all right with Shayne. Lucy would have gotten to the Buick and called the police by now, and if they hurried, everything would be all right.

Logan's position suddenly fell silent. Shayne risked a glance over the top of his dune and saw nothing. He began to feel edgy when a minute had passed with no further firing.

"Freeze, Shayne!" The voice came from behind him, from the beach. Shayne held himself completely still in his crouched position as Logan continued, "I know this key a lot better than you do, Shayne. I was able to crawl around behind you. It's *really* over now."

Shayne launched himself to one side in a rolling dive. Logan's gun blasted, and Shayne felt a white-hot finger burn a trail along his left flank. Then he had Logan in his sights, and he fired until the gun

was empty.

The big .45 slugs smashed into Logan and sent him toppling backwards with a scream, his arms flailing. He fell at the edge of the water.

He stopped thrashing as Shayne approached slowly. The redhead looked down grimly at the body as waves washed over its face. Fred Logan would never come back from this death.

Shayne hauled the body out of the water and left it on the beach. He trudged wearily back toward the causeway, past the shack, which had collapsed but was still burning brightly. Lucy got out of the Buick and ran toward him as he approached.

She came into his arms and buried her face against his chest. "Michael . . . *Michael*, are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Angel." He tilted her head back to look at her. "How about you?"

"I'm fine, too. I got hold of the State Police, and they're on their way."

"What about Janet?"

"I've got her tied up. She didn't give me any trouble."

Shayne peered closely at Lucy's left eye in the light from the flames. "She didn't, eh? Looks like you're going to have quite a shiner there in the morning, Angel."

She laughed, and they walked back toward the car, putting the fire behind them.

# A Spark Of Imagination

by Patrick Scaffetti

It was my first murder. I was determined to make it a really good one.

THE TUESDAY MORNING that Kenneth Bentley stopped into my office with his unusual directive began much like any other I'd known for the past twelve years. As always, I rode the crowded, swaying bus from my suburban home to the downtown offices of the Bentley Shoe Company and took the self-service elevator to the third floor.

My office was a drab, pale green cubicle with as much personality as celery. Without looking, I tossed my coat on the rack and sat down behind my desk. The only indication that I'd spent nearly a quarter of my life within the confines of this room was an old framed photograph of my wife, Edith, and our three children. Rick and Terry were now in college, Julie was married, and Edith was some forty pounds heavier. But the picture brought back pleasant memories so I kept it propped on a corner of my desk, a harmless anachronism.

I glanced from the picture to the clock on the wall: 7:55. Before

long, the laughter and chatter of the arriving secretaries would overflow into my office.

I'd been working steadily for an hour when someone rapped on the door, then opened it before I had a chance to reply. Kenneth Bentley, the president of the company, stepped inside, quietly closed the door behind him, and locked it. I couldn't recall Mr. Bentley ever coming into my office before, and I felt myself tense with apprehension.

"Good morning, Sid," he said mildly. "How are you today?"

"Fine, Mr. Bentley. Just fine," I replied. My palms suddenly felt damp, and I was relieved that he made no move to shake hands.

"And the family?"

"All doing well." I twisted my mouth into a nervous smile.

"I'm glad to hear that, Sid," he said, dragging a wooden chair over to my desk. He sat down, crossed his legs casually, and drew a pack of cigarettes from his suitcoat.

He lit his cigarette, inhaled

deeply, and blew a heavy billow of gray smoke into the air. I hastily searched a cluttered drawer for an ashtray and pushed it over to him.

Mr. Bentley leaned back and stared at me with cold, appraising eyes, as though seeing me for the first time. He was a tall man in his mid thirties, but already he was developing a paunch, and his dark hair was sprinkled with gray. An excess of the good life had left his face puffy and flushed. He bore a strong resemblance to his father, the founder of Bentley Shoes, but there was none of the old man's gentleness and good humor reflected in his face. At last he asked. "How long have you been with the company, Sid?"

"Twenty-seven years," I answered.

"You were one of my father's first employees, weren't you?"

"Yes. I started out putting soles on shoes when your father had only a dozen men working for him. Then, a few years later, I worked my way up to foreman. Mr. Bentley was a fine businessman."

"He certainly was. He turned a small shoe factory into the huge company it is today."

"It's a shame that he didn't live to see what a success Bentley Shoes would become," I said.

Bentley nodded. "It's especially a shame for your sake, Sid."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The company was just coming

into its own when Dad had his heart attack. He was in the midst of expansion, and he needed more people to fill executive positions. You must have known that he had you in mind for sales director. But I stepped into the presidency when he died, and I brought a friend of mine from college into the company — Nick Kaiser. To be honest, Sid, I would have left you in the factory as a foreman, but my brother, Michael, put a great deal of pressure on me to promote you. Michael was much more loyal to our father than I ever was. In fact, if he were president instead of vice-president, you'd be sales director, Sid. You've got Michael to thank for having even this modest cubby-hole of an office."

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat and cleared my throat. "I hope you're not regretting my promotion," I said.

"No, I'm not. You've done a very adequate job. You're a competent and dedicated employee, but you'll never get another promotion. You're locked into this position, and you'll never rise above it. Do you know why?"

I shook my head feebly but made no reply.

"Because you're dull, Sid, incredibly dull. To be an effective executive, you need something beyond competency and dedication — you need drive and a spark of imagination, as well. And you were sorrowfully

short-suited in both of those areas."

Bentley's words hurt me in a way that I'd never been hurt before. I'd dedicated my life to the company, and now I was being told in no uncertain terms that I'd reached the end of the line. Of course, I'd known that Nathaniel Bentley had wanted me to direct the sales department. The old man had recognized and appreciated my abilities, but he had died too soon. When Kenneth took over and made Nick Kaiser the sales director, I'd been bitter, but I always suspected in the back of my mind that eventually I'd be promoted to a higher position. Now, all of those unspoken dreams were shattered. I opened my mouth to speak, then realized that there was nothing for me to say.

Bentley stared directly into my eyes. "I'm being honest with you, Sid, because I've got a proposition for you, and, before I continue, it's important that you know exactly where you stand. You're fifty-two years old, putting two sons through college, paying off a mortgage, and doing your best to stay one step ahead of inflation. You make a decent salary here, but nothing exorbitant. If you were to leave the company, you'd never find a comparable position at your age. In short, you need this job."

I peered down at the top of my desk, feeling a painful lump form

in my throat. There was no need to protest — we both knew that he was right. But why, suddenly, had he decided to be so cruelly frank with me? I waited with a sickening sensation in the pit of my stomach to hear what his proposition would be.

"Keeping that firmly in mind, I'm going to explain why I've come to see you," he said. For the first time, I detected an uneasy edge to his voice.

"Yes, go on," I said weakly.

"I've gotten myself into a bit of a bind, Sid, and I need your help. There's a man who has some photos of a young lady and me in rather compromising positions. He's threatening to send them to my wife unless I pay him a substantial sum of money. I have no intention of paying him the money, but he doesn't know that. I've made arrangements to meet him behind the Moulin Rouge Bar this Friday night at ten o'clock. He thinks he'll be getting the money then, but he's in for a surprise."

"But why are you telling me this, Mr. Bentley? How can I possibly fit into the picture?"

Bentley chuckled without humor and said, "You're going to meet him instead of me, Sid, and you're going to kill him."

"Kill him!" I gasped. "You're joking, aren't you, Mr. Bentley? This is some sort of a prank."

"I'm dead serious, Sid. I simply can't afford to let myself be black-

mailed, and the man is in a position to hurt me very badly. What other choice have I got?"

"But why me?" I demanded. "I'm not a killer, for God's sake. You've said yourself that I'm a drab, unimaginative man."

"That's exactly why I've selected you, Sid. You're so meek and mild that no one would ever suspect you of murder. You and I are the only two who know anything about this. I suppose I could have looked into hiring a professional killer, but I don't want any ties to organized crime. No, Sid, I've given it a lot of thought, and you're my man."

"I can't do it, Mr. Bentley," I said firmly.

"Oh, yes, you can, Sid. If you don't, you'll lose your job, and we've already discussed what your prospects would be outside of the company. And if you tell anyone, I'll deny everything. It would be my word against yours, Sid, and you can guess who would be believed. On the other hand, if you agree to help me out, you'll receive a very nice bonus — enough to keep you out of debt for a long time."

For a moment, I felt as though I was going to faint. When the feeling passed, I said, "This isn't a proposition at all — it's a directive."

"Call it whatever you like, but you needn't worry. There's really no risk involved. The whole thing is foolproof." Bentley reached into

his suitcoat and drew out a gun. "Years back, you were in the army, Sid. You should have no trouble handling this .38 revolver. It's unregistered. When you meet the man behind the bar, simply tell him that you've got the money, and, as you hand him an empty attache case, shoot him. There's a silencer on the gun so the shot will be muffled. Take the packet of pictures from him, and leave immediately. I'll meet you here in the office parking lot afterward to make sure that everything has gone according to plan. You'll dispose of the gun, and that will be the end of it — except for your bonus, of course."

Sitting across from Mr. Bentley, I felt as if my entire body had been numbed with Novocaine. There appeared to be no way out of the situation. I either committed a crime that horrified me or lost my job. I tried to think of a valid reason to turn Bentley down, but my mind seemed to work in slow motion.

"Won't the man suspect that you might try something like this?" I asked. "Won't he be prepared for a double-cross?"

"I don't think so. He's new at this game, and he thinks that he's got me over a barrel. He'll have all of the pictures and negatives with him. And, if he doesn't, that's my problem. Your part will be over with."

Bentley smiled. "You really have no alternative, Sid. I'm

sorry to have to put you in a bind like this, but there's no other way out for me. I'm leaving the revolver with you. It's already loaded, so be careful. Remember — ten o'clock behind the Moulin Rouge Bar. Be there, kill him, take the pictures, and meet me back here."

Bentley leaned forward and shoved the gun toward me. "See you Friday night," he said, then turned and let himself out of the office.

I SAT FOR A LONG time after Bentley left, staring in disbelief at the revolver. I hadn't seen a gun close up since I'd gotten out of the army nearly thirty years before, and the one in front of me now filled me with fear. Bentley had considered all of the angles before approaching me, and he'd known in advance that I'd have no choice but to use the weapon as he'd instructed.

Finally, I slipped the revolver into a desk drawer and tried to concentrate on the work at hand. I filled out shipping orders by rote, while my mind stayed riveted on Bentley's murderous directive.

Shortly before noon, there was another rap on the door, and Nick Kaiser stepped into my office. Why was it that no one waited until I invited them to enter? I wondered.

"Hi, Sid," Nick said in his jovial voice. "Busy at work as always, I see."

Though I was fifteen years older than Nick, he treated me as if I were his junior. He was a swarthy, handsome man who dressed in the most up-to-date, flashiest styles.

"What can I do for you, Nick?" I asked.

"Just stopping by to say hello," he said in a condescending tone. "I like to keep an eye on my staff, and make sure that everything is running smoothly. After all, that's what I'm paid for."

"Everything's fine here, Nick," I said brusquely. "If any problem arises, you'll be the first to know." I felt a fleeting satisfaction — this was the closest I'd come to sarcasm in years.

"Well, always try to avoid any problems before they develop," Nick said. "I noticed Ken Bentley stopped in here this morning. Nothing's wrong, I hope."

"Nothing whatsoever," I replied, finally understanding why Nick was here. "He just wanted to discuss some business," I added cryptically. "Nothing that would be of concern to you."

"See to it that you keep me abreast of any goings-on around here," Nick reminded me coldly, then left my office. He closed the door much harder than necessary.

I stared at the closed door, realizing how deeply I hated Nick Kaiser. He'd treated me like an incompetent underling ever since he had joined the company. If Bentley had ordered me to kill Kaiser, I thought bitterly, it might



almost be a pleasure. Then, surprised at my sudden ferocity, I busied myself with the papers before me.

AS I RODE THE BUS toward home that evening, I rested my head back against the seat and let my thoughts wander. They never strayed beyond Bentley's directive.

Could I do it? I wondered. Could I actually kill a man? Everything in me cried no, but what choice did I have? Bentley was right. I was a dull, unimaginative employee. It didn't matter that I was routinely competent and loyal. I knew that I would have been a far better sales director than Kaiser, but I'd never have the chance to prove it. I lacked that spark of imagination that Kenneth Bentley valued so highly. And, now, if I didn't kill a man, I would have no job at all. Bentley owned me. I was no longer master of my own fate, free to make my own decisions. I was company property, and, as president of the company, Bentley pulled my strings.

I wondered what old Nathaniel Bentley would think of this if he were still alive, then realized that it was a senseless question. If he were still alive, I'd be sales director, and Kenneth would have no power over me. Even if Nathaniel's younger son, Michael, were in charge, things would be different. Michael was much like

his father — a fair, generous, and kind man. He would never have gotten himself into the mess that Ken had, let alone expect me to get him out of it by committing murder. He'd expressed his regret when Nick Kaiser was made sales director. Michael had wanted me to fill the position, but the final decision was Kenneth's, for better or worse.

Perhaps things would be different if I had that spark of imagination Kenneth spoke of. I wondered idly if it were still possible to develop it at my age.

With a start, I realized that it was not too late. Imagination was simply making the best of the situation, turning things to your own advantage, exploring all of the possibilities.

Frightened at first, when with growing confidence, I let my mind loose to explore those possibilities.

THE REMAINDER of the week passed in dull routine, and only Kenneth Bentley and I knew that I was soon to become a murderer. On Friday, he stepped into my office, again without invitation.

"Just to remind you about tonight, Sid," he said. "Remember to meet me in the parking lot afterward. As far as we're concerned, we were both working overtime tonight."

"All right, Mr. Bentley," I said calmly.

"And don't forget the bonus that's in store for you."

"I won't," I assured him.  
"See you tonight."

Bentley nodded and left my office. As soon as he was gone, my heart began to pound furiously.

AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK that evening, I drove my car into the parking lot of the Bentley Shoe Company. No bus tonight — frugality had no place in the committing of murder. The lot was dark and deserted. It took me a moment to spot Bentley's car parked off to one side.

When I pulled up beside him, Bentley hurried over to me. "How did it go?" he asked in a tense voice. "Do you have the pictures?"

"Yes," I said as I climbed from my car.

"That'll teach anyone to blackmail me," he said smugly. "Where are the pictures? Give them to me."

I reached into the pocket of my jacket.

"Hurry up," Bentley commanded.

I pulled out the revolver, aimed, and fired at his chest. His face contorted in shock and pain, and I shot him again. He fell back against his car, then slid soundlessly to the ground.

Feeling more relaxed than I had in days, I got back into my car. As I drove toward Nick Kaiser's house, I wondered how long the man with the pictures

would wait before he decided that no one was coming.

MY NEW OFFICE — Nick Kaiser's old one — is spacious and beautifully furnished, a proper setting for the sales director of a large company. A huge window looks out over the parking lot, and, every now and then, I like to gaze down at the spot where Kenneth Bentley's body was found. It reminds me that a spark of imagination can carry a man a long way.

And my spark had set a bonfire.

Nick Kaiser's body was found behind his house the same day the police discovered Bentley.

Both men had been killed with the same gun. All of us at the shoe company were questioned extensively by the authorities, but no one was able to provide any concrete leads. When Bentley's wife received the photos from the anonymous blackmailer, the detectives somehow tied everything together and decided that organized crime was responsible for the killings. Now, months later, they're still pursuing that dead-end trail.

With Kenneth out of the way, Michael stepped into the presidency of the company, and he promoted me the same week. Bill Reynolds, my assistant sales director, seems like a loyal and competent employee, but he's rather drab and unimaginative. I hope he stays that way.

# To Love Thy Neighbor



by Lawrence Treat

One thing leads to another. An apple, for example, can lead to arson . . .

IT IS AN ACCEPTED FACT that Sir Isaac Newton's apple fell straight down, without hesitation, but this one did not.

It was a large, luscious apple, and it dropped from the tree on the Atkins lot, bounced nimbly off a twig or two, and landed with scarcely a plop on the thick carpeting of grass on Ed Barum's side of the boundary line.

Atkins didn't actually see it fall, but he did see Barum pick it up and start to eat. Whereupon Atkins jumped up in anger and came stomping out of his house.

"Hey!" he shrieked, bristling like a thin, scrawny alley cat. "That's my apple!"

Barum, standing there like a monolith, chewed thoughtfully.

"Yours?" he said, not quite understanding the onslaught.

"Yours?" Then the light dawned on him and he tossed the half-eaten apple at Atkins. "Delicious," Barum said. "Have a bite."

Atkins ducked, and responded in fury. "Don't throw things at me," he yelled. "And what makes you think I'm going to take your leavings?"

Barum frowned, shrugged, and said mildly, "I'm sorry." With which remark he considered the incident closed, and walked off. Atkins glared, but all he could do was storm back into his house and sound off to his wife.

"That guy!" Atkins said. "Thinks everything belongs to

him. If he wanted an apple, why didn't he ask for it? I'd give him one. Sure. But stealing it?" And Atkins ground his teeth in anger.

Later on that week he bought a fence. It was about two feet high and resembled a snow fence, and while a number of apples continued to fall on the wrong side of it, nevertheless the fence constituted a psychological barrier. Barum, doubtless, would have sense enough to realize he had no right to cross over it. Nor did he cross, although his dog did.

It was a frisky dog and conceived of itself as a kind of canine steeplechaser, and it practiced by leaping the fence. Atkins yelled and threw stones at it, which the dog regarded as a game. When Atkins kept on yelling, the dog barked joyously. When Atkins heaved stones at it, the dog picked up the stones and buried them in the Atkins zinnia bed, in small, irregular excavations.

In a fury, Atkins phoned Barum. "That dog of yours keeps coming onto my property. It's trespassing."

"Yes?" Barum said.

"Keep him away. Chain him up. Because next time he comes over and annoys me, I'll kill him."

"I'll tie him up for a while,"

Barum said. "Sorry he's bothering you."

Barum was true to his word, but the dog missed its freedom and yelped and whined all day long. In the evening, Eunice

Atkins complained.

"I can't stand it," she told her husband. "The noise that dog makes — I'm going out of my mind."

"I'll fix him," Atkins said, and he phoned Barum.

"Barum!" he roared. "Will you muzzle that damn dog of yours? All he does is yowl."

"That's because he's tied up."

"Then untie him. But don't let him on my property."

"I'll tell him," Barum said.

The next day the dog resumed its dedicated task of digging up the Atkins zinnias. Feeling self-righteous, Atkins bought some poison and spread it on a couple of dog biscuits which he left just on his side of the fence. Two days later the Atkins cat sickened and died, but it was obvious the Barum dog had no palate for the biscuits. Possibly, Barum was heard to remark, it hadn't read those TV ads.

Time, however, has a way of solving many problems. The last apple fell, and the Barum dog tired of fence-jumping and found a girlfriend with whom he romped all day long in the empty lot that was second from the corner. And the Barums repainted their house.

Atkins raged. "Orange!" he said, fuming. "Every house on the row has red, but Barum has to go and be different. Who does he think he is, anyhow?"

Eunice Atkins was equally

disturbed. "We ought to do something about it," she said.

"You're damn right we ought to. It would serve him right if his house burned down."

"That orange is so ugly," Eunice said.

"He did it just to annoy us. I'll get him. I'll think of something." And he ground his teeth.

On his next trip to the dentist, there were three new cavities.

"Comes from grinding your teeth," the dentist said. "You're scraping off all the enamel, and then the food gets in and starts the decay process. Are you worried about anything?"

"Hell, no!" Atkins said. "I'm just mad because I've got a rotten, stinking, no-good neighbor who steals my apples."

"Come back next Thursday," the dentist said, "and we'll take care of those teeth. I'll file some of them down, to adjust the bite."

Atkins went away cursing. "I'll get that Barum!" he kept telling himself. "I'll get him so mad he'll move out of the neighborhood."

HE TALKED IT OVER with Eunice that evening. "I noticed that the Barums go to bed early, long before we do," he said. "If we opened our windows and played the radio at top volume, they'd never go to sleep."

"What a good idea!" Eunice said.

Consequently the Atkins radio blared until midnight. Although their phone rang a number of times, neither of the Atkinses answered it.

"Must be the Barums complaining," Atkins said smugly. "Let them keep ringing."

The next morning Eunice woke up with a headache. "It's that radio," she said. "It kept echoing in my ears all night long."

Later on in the day several of the neighbors phoned her about the radio. They all said more or less the same thing.

"It kept us awake," they said. "I called to ask you to tone it down, but nobody answered."

There was, however, no reaction from the Barums. Apparently they were unusually sound sleepers.

A couple of evenings later Atkins sneaked outside his house with a pile of garbage. Then, afraid he'd be seen in the glare of the street light that fronted the Barums', he reentered his house. The next time he came out, he heaved a stone at the light. His aim was excellent, and the bulb shattered and spread shards of glass alongside the curb, where the Barums usually parked their car.

Congratulating himself on his accuracy, Atkins ducked back his doorway and waited. When he felt certain that no one intended to investigate the broken light, he

stepped out again with his garbage and dumped it on the Barum lawn.

He slept soundly and contentedly until four a.m., when the barking of dogs awakened him. Cautiously he peeked through the window and saw a troupe of the local mongrels cleaning up the mess. The next day he noticed that Barum had spread his garbage on his own lawn.

"Beats lugging that heavy garbage pail around," he was reported to have said, "and besides, those mutts are finally getting some good food. As for the cans and bottles, I recycle them, which I should have been doing in the first place."

After hearing that, Atkins slept fitfully, and his muttering kept Eunice awake. She shook him angrily.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded. "Spaniels — cycles — you keep saying the same things over and over again. Why?"

"Mmm," Atkins said sleepily. "Rrr."

Instead of coming home directly that night, he stopped in at a downtown bar, where he got drunk and poured out his troubles to the bartender.

"I hate that guy," Atkins said. "First he swiped all my apples, then his mutt ruined my wife's flowerbeds, and now he went and painted his house orange, just to spite me. Red isn't good enough

for him, but what can I do?"

"You got to learn to get along with people," the bartender said.

"Nuts!" Atkins said. "Not with him. Give me another drink."

"You've had plenty."

"Are you telling me when I can drink and when I can't?"

"It's up to you," the bartender said. "Just a friendly suggestion."

"I ought to burn down his house," Atkins said. "That would show him."

"Take it easy," the bartender said. "Why don't you take your drink and sit over there in a booth, nice and quiet?"

"The hell with you!" Atkins said. "Nobody bosses me around."

But he went over to the booth and sat down, alone.

After a few minutes a small man in a gray windbreaker squeezed into the narrow seat on the other side of the table.

"Don't mind if I keep you company, do you?" the small man said.

Atkins snorted. "You're a better man than that bartender. He insulted me."

"I heard what you said," the small man remarked. "About that neighbor of yours."

"What did I say?"

"That you ought to burn his house down."

"Would serve him right," Atkins said.

"How much is it worth to you?"

the small man said.

Atkins gulped. "What?" he said.

"How much is it worth, torching his house?"

"I got money," Atkins said thickly. "I'll pay you. Sure."

"Five grand."

Atkins rubbed his eyes, rubbed his cheeks, and then rubbed his chin. When he spoke, he lowered his voice and he was considerably more sober.

"Are you saying that you'll burn down his house for five thousand dollars?"

"You heard me."

"Suppose I paid you — how do I know you'll do the job?"

"Ask anybody about me," the small man said. "Bill the Burner. I got an arrest record a mile long. Arraigned eleven times on suspicion of arson, but they never even got enough evidence to go to trial. I know my trade and I'm good at it. Ask the bartender."

Atkins arose, weaved over the bar, and motioned to the bartender. When he approached, Atkins leaned forward and whispered.

"The little guy," he said. "Who's he?"

The bartender gave the small man a worried glance. "Stay away from him," he said. "He's no good. He'll burn your house down, and love it. Bill the Burner, confirmed arsonist."

Atkins returned to the booth. "Five thousand's a lot of money," he said.

Bill the Burner shrugged. "Okay, then. Forget it."

"How would I pay you?"

"One grand now, the rest after the job is done."

"You trust me for it?" Atkins said.

The small man grimaced, then drew his hand slowly across his throat. "I don't kid around," he said.

Atkins shuddered. "Suppose I went to the bank tomorrow and drew a thousand — then what?"

"Then you come here with it, same time tomorrow."

"I'll think it over," Atkins said, but he knew he was hooked.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATER he kept his appointment in the bar. He took exactly one drink and brought it to a booth, where he sat down and sipped slowly. After about ten minutes Bill the Burner appeared, headed for the booth, and slunk down on the bench opposite Atkins.

"Got it?" Bill asked.

"I got it," Atkins said sharply. "Now listen carefully. You know the Low Hills development?"

"I did a job there a couple of years ago."

"Good. You go down the main drive and turn right on Foxbury. The house with the orange trim, it's the fifth house on the right, that's the one. You start counting from the corner house. That corner house is number one, and you



count up to five. Fifth house, orange trim. You can't mistake it. Okay?"

"You're a careful man," Bill said, "but don't worry. I don't make mistakes. When do you want it done?"

"While I'm in Europe. I'm going there on business on the twelfth of next month. I'll be gone exactly two weeks. Do it any time between the twelfth and the twenty-sixth, but not on either of those days. Okay?"

"Sure, so let's have the dough."

Atkins' hands trembled as he slid the envelope across the table. The small man accepted the envelope and stuffed it in his pocket without looking.

"If this is short," he said, "the deal's off and I keep the dough."

"It's all there," Atkins said.

Bill the Burner nodded. "Okay, Mr. Atkins."

The mention of his name startled Atkins. "Huh?" he said. "How did you know who I am?"

"Easy," Bill said. "In my line of work I got to find out whom I'm dealing with, so I followed you the other night."

"Oh," Atkins said. He got up slowly and left without finishing his drink.

The following week Eunice drove him to the airport. Atkins hummed all the way, and Eunice remarked upon it.

"You seem so happy," she said.

"Why not, when Barum will be

off my neck."

"You mean for two weeks?"

"Of course," Atkins said.

"What else?"

He had a strange abiding faith in the little arsonist. Other people, Atkins reflected, might have been worried about either being tricked or being implicated in arson, but not Atkins. He trusted Bill and consequently Atkins ate well, slept well and was inordinately successful in his mission. So much so that he permitted himself to look forward to a substantial raise. With that in view, he treated himself to the luxury of a taxi from the airport, instead of the usual and much slower bus-train combination that brought him home long after midnight.

Although he was tired and night had set in, he enjoyed the ride and he leaned back and closed his eyes. He napped sporadically and had a succession of delightful dreams. In all of them he seemed to see the smoking ruin of the Barum house.

He woke up when the taxi stopped. "Here you are, Mister. Fourth house."

Atkins shook his head sleepily. "You're mixed up. This is the third one. I know it because it has that birdbath on the lawn in front of it. It's next to mine."

"Mister," the cabby said, "I can count. There's the corner house, and then that brand new prefab, and then two more and then this."

"New prefab?" Atkins said, straightening up with a jolt.

He gasped as he looked at the next lot and saw the charred ruin of his own house, now number five in the row. A moment later he saw Barum approaching and heard him speak.

"I've been waiting," he said, "to tell you how sorry I am about what happened. And don't worry about your wife, she's in the hospital but she's going to be all right. Those burns will leave some scars, but otherwise she'll be fine."

"But — what happened?"

"I thought you knew," Barum said. "A sudden fire in the middle of the night. Your wife was lucky to get out."

"The rat!" Atkins exclaimed. "The stupid, bungling, lousy rat. I won't pay him. Not a cent."

Barum's voice was consoling. "You're upset," he said. "Of course you are, but why take it out on the taxi driver? I'll pay him."

Atkins shook his head rapidly, without comprehension, and his eyes were on the Barum house. Red trim, orange trim — how could you tell? Because here in the dark, the two colors were indistinguishable.

Meanwhile Barum was talking. "If there's anything I can do, just ask me. Because no matter what, I want you to keep thinking of me as a good neighbor." And Barum held out a warm, friendly hand.

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## COMING NEXT MONTH:

**MIKE SHAYNE** in **WRITTEN IN BLOOD**

A new short novel by Brett Halliday

**MAJOR LANSING** in **THE CONFERENCE KILL**

A novelet by W. L. Fieldhouse

Plus **JOHNNY NINETY** — an unusual novelet  
about organized crime by Dick Stodghill

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# Triple Indemnity

by Charles E. Fritch

Mr. Jones sells death insurance.

You'll like him . . .

THE THOUGHT OF KILLING her husband Jeffrey had never seriously crossed Helen Spindler's mind until the man in the gray flannel suit suggested it.

The man's name, he told her, was Jones, and he was a "kind of insurance agent."

"We already have a sufficient amount of life insurance," she told him, though she really wasn't sure just how much life insurance they had. Jeffrey had never confided that information to her, and she had no head for figures.

She started to shut the front door, considering the matter closed, but Mr. Jones placed his foot expertly in the way, efficiently blocking the door open.

"I'm not selling life insurance, Mrs. Spindler," he told her with a pleasant smile. "It's more like . . . death insurance. May I come in and discuss it with you?"

And before she could protest, he insinuated himself through the opening past her and was walking from the foyer into the living room.

Helen felt exasperation tug at her. She was supposed to meet Harvey at his apartment in a half-

hour, to spend a blissful afternoon of carnal pleasure while Jeffrey labored at the advertising agency. Well, she'd get rid of this Mr. Jones in short order. What was he selling? *Death* insurance? That was strange. She'd never heard of that.

"Very nice place you have here, Mrs. Spindler," Mr. Jones said, gazing around the large living room at the expensive furniture, the tasteful paintings, the costly drapes.

"Thank you, Mr. Jones," Helen said. "Now about this insurance you're selling. Jeffrey — Mr. Spindler has quite enough —"

"One hundred thousand dollars," Mr. Jones said.

Helen stared at him. "What?"

"Your husband has one hundred thousand dollars on his life, Mrs. Spindler, with a triple indemnity clause."

"A triple . . ."

"— indemnity clause which will pay off three hundred thousand dollars in case of violent death."

Helen caught her breath. Jeffrey gave her a hundred dollars a week expense money, which had seemed like an awful lot to her.

The notion of three thousand times that was mind-staggering.

Mr. Jones' smile broadened. "You and Harvey Brill could really have yourselves a time on that, couldn't you?"

Breathlessly, Helen nodded. "Harvey has always wanted lots of money. I give him what I can out of my hundred dollars a week, but —"

She stopped, the blood rushing to her cheeks as she realized what Mr. Jones had said — and what she was saying.

Mr. Jones laughed. "Don't worry, Mrs. Spindler, I'm not planning to tell anyone — including your husband — about your affair."

She watched him make himself comfortable on the couch, then she sat in a chair opposite him. She wet her lips uncertainly. The conversation had taken a strange turn. A stranger was sitting here in her home telling her he knew about her affair with a man who was not her husband, and she didn't know what to say to him.

"I'm also not going to blackmail you, Mrs. Spindler," Mr. Jones assured her, "in case that notion had entered your pretty head."

It hadn't. But now it did. Also, she felt a warm glow at his compliment. *Pretty head*. Yes, for a woman in her mid-thirties, she was quite attractive, not only in face but in figure as well. The admiring glances of Mr. Jones renewed her realization of this.

Mr. Jones leaned forward. "Perhaps, Mrs. Spindler, you're curious as to the purpose of my visit."

Helen nodded. "To sell me insurance, I suppose."

"Not at all," Mr. Jones said. "You have quite enough insurance. I am here, Mrs. Spindler, to see that you collect on the insurance already in existence."

Helen's eyes widened. "But the only way I could collect," she said, "would be if —"

"— if your husband Jeffrey died," Mr. Jones agreed.

It was Helen's turn to laugh.

"My husband is as healthy as a goat, Mr. Jones. He'll probably outlive us all."

"Not," Mr. Jones said, "if he has an accident."

"An accident, Mr. Jones?"

"An accident, Mrs. Spindler, in which case you stand to get from the insurance company not merely one hundred thousand dollars, but *three* hundred thousand dollars."

Helen Spindler caught her breath once more. There it was again, those large numbers. If she had that much money, she and Harvey could have a lot of fun together — even more, if that was possible, than they were having now.

Or would be having now, she corrected her thought and frowned, if she weren't sitting here talking to Mr. Jones. She stood up. "I really must ask you to leave," she told him. "I have an appoint-

ment —"

Mr. Jones raised a hand. "I fully understand. Harvey is waiting at his apartment for you." He rose. "I trust, however, you'll think over my offer."

"Offer? What offer?"

Mr. Jones sighed. Helen Spindler was a beautiful, a desirable, woman, but she was rather shallow in the brain department. He said, "Let me put it this way, Mrs. Spindler. I guarantee to arrange a violent accident for your husband in return for my fee, after you collect the money of course, of one-third of the insurance monies."

"One-third?"

"One hundred thousand dollars is my fee, but remember you have two hundred thousand dollars left over. And there's the bank accounts, the stocks and bonds, the personal property, this house and that land out in the desert."

Helen Spindler nodded thoughtfully. Two hundred thousand dollars didn't seem quite as much as three hundred thousand dollars. Still, it was a sizable amount. Besides, as Mr. Jones had pointed out, there were the other assets; she didn't know how much they were worth, but she was sure, now that she bothered to think about it, that it would amount to quite a bit all by themselves.

"You don't have to give me your answer right now," Mr. Jones told her. "Talk it over with Harvey. I'm sure he'll have some ideas on

the subject. But don't wait *too* long. After all, I do have other customers, you know, and I operate on a first come, first served basis." He extended a white pasteboard. "My card."

Helen stared at the card, which contained the name *Mr. Jones* and a local address. There was no firm name, no telephone number. She followed Mr. Jones to the door.

"Good-bye, Mr. Jones," she said.

"Be seeing you, Mrs. Spindler," he corrected.

For a long moment after the man had gone, Helen stood by the door and wondered what she should do. Jeffrey was a good man, and she genuinely liked him. He was good to her, too. True, the fire had gone out of their marriage, and it had taken Harvey to rekindle the smoldering embers, but she didn't hate her husband enough to kill him.

On the other hand, she didn't love him enough to pass up the opportunity of getting a lot of money.

Perhaps it was a practical joke.

Yes, that was it — a practical joke. She smiled at the card and prepared to tear it into pieces — then changed her mind. She'd show it to Harvey. He'd get a good laugh out of it.

HARVEY BRILL didn't get a good laugh out of it. He stared thoughtfully at the business card and shook his head. "It's no joke. This

man Jones knew all about your husband's insurance — and about us. What did he look like?"

"Mr. Jones?" Helen thought a moment. "Well, he was wearing a gray flannel suit, which I thought was kind of tacky and old-fashioned. He had dark hair with some specks of gray in it. Sort of ordinary-looking, otherwise, but kind of cute in a way."

Harvey stared at her incredulously. "Kind of cute?"

"Well, not as cute as you," she assured him, moving in to hug him.

But Harvey wasn't in the mood. He shrugged her off. "There's something funny about this," he said. "I don't like it."

She pouted. "But I've hugged you lots of times like that."

"No, no," Harvey said, trying in vain to keep the exasperation from his face and voice. There were times when Helen Spindler was so dumb he couldn't stand her. But she did give him money from her modest weekly stipend. His face softened and he held her close. "I'm sorry I snapped at you."

"That's okay," she told him, nibbling at his ear. "I didn't realize this would upset you or I wouldn't have mentioned it."

"I'm glad you did. It opens up an interesting possibility." He hesitated. "What do you think about — about having Jeffrey killed?"

She shrugged. "I hadn't

thought much about it." She wasn't in the mood to think about it now, not with Harvey holding her close to his hard, young masculine body and with the masculine scent of him filling her nostrils and making her head swim.

"Without Jeffrey, it'd be you and me, baby," he reminded her, "all the time, and with two — hundred — thousand — dollars of our own to play with."

"Whatever you think best," she said. "But let's talk about it later, okay?"

Harvey Brill put it out of his conversation but not out of his mind. The thought of killing Jeffrey Spindler and marrying the rich widow had crossed his mind many times. But he knew that he was not a killer. He was too afraid of botching the job, or getting caught.

But if someone else did it, an expert, someone who could make it appear like an accident . . .

Two hundred thousand dollars plus in one lump sum was certainly better than the pittance doled out each week. A resourceful man could do a lot with all that money.

"I'm going to see Mr. Jones," he told Helen sometime later.

She struggled to rear zipper up the back of her dress. "Oh, that's nice. Are we going to have Jeffrey killed?"

Harvey smiled. Funny how easy, how casual, it seemed to talk about it. "Yes. We're going to

have Jeffrey killed."

HELEN LEFT so she could be home when her husband arrived from work. She didn't offer to go with him to see Mr. Jones, but then Harvey didn't want her along. He was certain the "death insurance" man wouldn't mind talking to him. After all, he knew exactly what the relationship was between Harvey and Helen.

Harvey drove his ancient Plymouth to the address on the card, thinking how nice it would be to be driving a big shiny, expensive automobile when he had the money — but the address was that of a vacant lot.

"Damn!" He threw an annoyed punch at the steering wheel. So it was a practical joke after all!

He parked the car and got out, walked up and down the street for a few minutes, fuming. By the time he got back to his car a large black sedan was pulling up in back of it. A gray-flannel-suited man sat behind the wheel, motioning for him to get in.

Harvey opened the car door, slid into the front passenger seat, closed the door behind him. He indicated the empty lot. "I thought —"

"In my business, Mr. Brill," the man said, "It's better that I don't have a permanent address."

"You're Mr. Jones?"

"Of course. And you're here to negotiate a deal to have Jeffrey Spindler killed."

Harvey wet cottony lips. "You'll make it look like an accident; so the police won't suspect?"

"Believe me, Mr. Brill, I am an expert on these matters. I stage them very carefully, with the skill of a choreographer. The motives don't matter to me, but tell me, don't you feel a twinge of conscience in planning another person's death?"

Harvey shrugged. "Why should I? I've never met the man. And he's worth two hundred thousand dollars to me dead. So why not?"

"Why not, indeed," Mr. Jones agreed. "An admirable philosophy, Mr. Brill. I concur most heartily."

"I — uh — don't have to sign any papers, do I?" Harvey wanted to know.

"I think not, Mr. Brill. The fewer complications, the better."

Harvey breathed a sigh of relief. "Good. You trust us and we'll trust you." His eyes narrowed. "Hey, what's that?"

Mr. Jones had extracted a shiny thing from his jacket. "A hypodermic needle, Mr. Brill. This is how I render my victim immobile, so I can do what I want with him."

"Hey, wait a minute," Harvey said, backing away, "I don't want to know anything about it. Just do what you have to do, but don't tell me, okay?"

"I'm afraid I have to tell you, Mr. Brill."

Suddenly Mr. Jones plunged



the needle in Harvey's neck and pushed the plunger.

Harvey yelped and slapped his neck where a drop of blood had appeared. "What'd you do that for?"

"Because you, Mr. Brill, are the victim," Mr. Jones said. "You were set up for this — oh, not by that dear, sweet, naive Mrs. Spindler, but by her husband Jeffrey."

Harvey knew he had to get out of the car — fast — but his whole body seemed to be growing numb and he couldn't move.

"Mr. Spindler doesn't show it, Mr. Brill, but he can be quite jealous, and lately the beautiful Helen has been getting indiscreet in her meetings with you. He decided to hire me to kill you — and make it look like an accident, of course."

"No," Harvey said thickly.

"Yes," Mr. Jones disagreed. "A pity I won't be getting much money for you — a mere ten thousand — but the method of death should be enjoyable. You've got an old car there, Mr. Brill. You'll have an accident in it, and you'll be trapped behind the wheel when the car catches fire. And you'll be fully awake during every agonizing second!"

"AN EXCELLENT MEAL, my dear," Jeffrey Spindler complimented his wife across the dinner table. "You're really a marvelous cook."

Helen Spindler blushed modestly. "The automated microwave oven did all the work, my darling. Can I get you more apple pie and brandy sauce?"

"No, thanks, I'm stuffed. But tell me, how did your day go? Anything interesting?"

Helen thought about Mr. Jones' visit to her and her visit to Harvey Brill's apartment. "No. I just puttered about."

"A shame you don't find some outside interests," he said with a smile. "You know, go out and make new friends . . ."

"Oh there was something interesting that happened today," Helen said. "A Mr. Jones dropped by. Twice. Once when you sent him to me to set up poor Harvey for the killing, and later, after he'd killed Harvey, to offer me a proposition I couldn't resist."

The smile faded from Jeffrey Spindler's face. "What?"

Helen smiled and nodded. "Mr. Jones said he'd sell me a poison that was absolutely undetectable — for one hundred thousand dollars of the insurance money. He'll stop by later to arrange the accident."

Jeffrey Spindler half-rose from his chair, clutching his heart, then collapsed forward, his astonished face settling on the empty plate before him.

"That was a good idea you had, Jeffrey," his wife said. "Thanks. I never would have thought of it myself."

# Adversaries

by Jerry Jacobson

*This story is about an ultimate caper that never happened. It's also about contemporary lifestyles, the way cons think, and the problems of growing old. But if all that sounds too solemn, just relax and enjoy it.*

DANNY COLE's DEATH by heart attack came only two scant days after O'Bannion had all the puzzle's pieces neatly fitted into their spaces. It left O'Bannion feeling just the slightest bit cheated. After all, he alone had been able to roll back all those years to uncover Danny Cole's audacious past. And now there would be no final accounting. It was a bit like rushing to the \$50 window at the track with a fistful of win tickets on a 90-to-one shot only to trip ten feet away and break your neck.

"He was whistling away, cleaning one of his boats down at the yacht harbor just like any other morning," O'Bannion was told over the telephone by Heine Waukenfuss, Danny's roommate. "You like to see your friend go in his sleep. That's the best way. But we can't arrange our own last appointments, I guess. They said he keeled over real quick, though. Like a clubbed horse. Maybe he never knew what hit him. I hope so."

O'Bannion expressed his regrets. He asked about the funeral. Heine Waukenfuss couldn't entirely mask his crying.

"Because Danny was Irish, we thought it would be real nice to throw a wake for him down at the Sloop Lounge near the yacht harbor. He knew a lot of the guys who came in there and lotsa people down on the piers. It'll be a big blowout, last maybe a week. They took him over to Springstad's Funeral Home about an hour ago to get embalmed and have his good suit put on him. We're gonna lay him out on the bartop on a bed of shamrocks — paper shamrocks, but they'll be soft. A place in town makes 'em out of toilet paper. The wake begins tomorrow morning at ten a.m."

"I'll be there, Heine," O'Bannion told him. "You can count on it."

"I found his will folded up in a matchbox and put up on his bookshelf," Heine Wakenfuss told

O'Bannion. "About a year ago, we wrote out our wills to each other, because neither of us had anybody. Kind of a poor man's ton-tine. Only in Danny's will, a very unusual thing has turned up."

"A key, you mean," said O'Bannion. "A key to a safe deposit box."

"H-how'd you know anything about a key, O'Bannion?" came Heine's mildly astounded voice.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow morning at the wake, Heine. Plus some other matters, as well. Point is, I think you have some pretty big decisions to make. Decisions which will test your honor to its limits."

"Test my honor? O'Bannion, what the devil are you talking about?"

O'Bannion figured it would keep until the next day. "We'll knock back some Irish whiskies to Danny's memory and talk about it in the morning," he told Heine Waukenfuss and put up the phone.

This was not quite the way O'Bannion had imagined an adversary would escape his confrontation with the truth. Now, the whole improbable caper was to be dumped directly into the lap of Heine Waukenfuss, an aging ex-con who was now San Francisco's oldest confessed former criminal.

O'Bannion's mind drifted back over the events of his past, a past that was nearly as long as

Waukenfuss'.

WHEN ALCATRAZ ISLAND was designated a Federal prison to capture the overflow of rampant crime during the Depression, Henry "Heine" Waukenfuss had been one of its first residents. That had been 1934. Waukenfuss had broken bread with Alvin Karpis, Machine Gun Kelly and other major anti-heroes. He'd even bought pet birds from Robert Stroud to stave off loneliness.

In 1963, when The Rock began to crumble to dust and its plumbing to rust, the nation's taxpayers were doling out fifteen dollars per day to support each of its inmates. And Heine Waukenfuss, when The Rock was closed down, became one of its last residents. During the intervening years, he was to be released twice and returned twice. With Alcatraz' demise, he finished out his time at Chino, to O'Bannion's knowledge the only period of Waukenfuss' life spent outside his beloved San Francisco.

Back then, O'Bannion had been a bemused police reporter for the San Francisco *Chronicle*. He was a fifty-five-year-old former general assignment reporter who had tumbled from his editor's grace for preferring to watch the *Comedie Humaine* rather than write about it. O'Bannion didn't rant over the banishment. Over his twenty-five years of reporting he'd snatched off his fair share

of page one bylines. If he hadn't succeeded to an editorship, well, he'd at least left his faint mark in the *Chronicle's* microfilm files at the public library. And he'd slipped two sons through college and had buried a sweet wife far before her time. Gearing down didn't bother him at all.

As it turned out, he fell in love with the police beat almost at once. Such a rich, varied, steady procession of criminal acts and characters. Everything from Nob Hill jewel thieves to Tenderloin pickpockets and all the improbable stops in between. For seven whacky, Runyonesque years he observed and wrote about it all, from the dim corridors to the interrogation rooms and the holding tanks of the City Jail on the seventh floor of the Hall of Justice Building on Bryant Street. Every day was like going to the movies and getting a paycheck for it besides.

Henry Waukenfuss was released from Chino in 1967. He was sixty-two years old, with very little to show for his life except the friendship of another ex-con named Danny Cole, whom he'd met at The Rock in the early 50s. Henry the three-time loser and Danny the two-timer got a walk-up apartment together in the North Beach area. Cole, the younger man at fifty-eight, had a headful of dazzling ideas for spectacular crimes. Henry Waukenfuss, the older and wiser, didn't enjoy the

luxury of one more mistake as did Danny Cole.

That was the year O'Bannion first met Henry Waukenfuss and learned his life's sad story. O'Bannion was eating his lunch in a popular deli on Van Ness one Saturday afternoon. Waukenfuss came in wearing a Humble Pie T-shirt and a leather bomber's jacket, a sixty-year-old ex-con, a fashion plate ten years ahead of his time and twenty years behind the rest of the social world. He recognized O'Bannion from his stamp-sized likeness which always appeared above his brief *Chronicle* column on crimes and those who deal them.

"Excuse me. Mr. O'Bannion? The cop writer?"

O'Bannion nodded and continued diminishing his fat hot pastrami, with sauerkraut and sour cream. When you had a hot pastrami, it was a serious responsibility to eat it while it was still hot. Like Chinese food, a hot pastrami sandwich was utterly no damn good cold. If you had cool sauerkraut and cold sour cream in it besides, you had to be all the more diligent.

"My name's Henry Waukenfuss. The cons call me Heine. I did the Nordic Cold Storage heist in 1933. The old Nordic Cold Storage plant was down on the Wharf, just off Bay Street. We got 350 sides of grade-A beef. Three of us went in through a skylight and unlocked a loading dock door

from the inside. We got them sides out of the building and onto a flatbed truck in under thirty minutes and hauled down the bay on a dirt road doing 50 mph. Back in the 30s, that was top speed. We had a souped-up Dodge engine."

"Don't think I remember the caper," O'Bannion told him between bites.

"We lost us a side of beef every two blocks. Damn dark, but the cops trailed us. I mean, even a dumb, turkey-brain cop can see a side of beef in the dark. The Golden Gate Bridge didn't go up until '37. Those engineers started that beast just five years sooner and we'd have been across the bay and away scot-free."

"Well, I wasn't the police reporter back then."

"It made all the papers," said Waukenfuss, his old, grayish eyes disappointed that a man with O'Bannion's wide exposure to criminal acts had missed that one entirely.

"Well, I don't read the newspapers all that much. I just work for one."

"I done my time at The Rock. Went in with the first group back in '34 and got out with the last ones in '63. I was in the deep six for clowning, trashing and fighting so often they almost give me a permanent key so whenever I messed up I could just head off for it on my own."

"The good old days," said

O'Bannion. "They can be bid up but not brought back."

Heine Waukenfuss leaned in closer. His unruly black eyebrows collected into one solid hood above his tired eyes. "Only Danny, my roomie, wants to bring them back. The old days."

"He wants to go back to prison," surmised O'Bannion.

"That's what it's going to get him, all right. See, we got us pretty good jobs. Danny, he works out at the yacht harbor on Marina Boulevard, cleaning boats. Me, I install seedlings and shrubs for Green Vistas Landscaping."

"So far, so honorable," O'Bannion commented.

"You only heard the half, O'Bannion. See, Danny is starting to plan capers again. Spectacular, stupid capers. Capers that are going to be about as successful as a show-biz act where a guy dances with a dead dog. Every night, the minute he gets home from work, he sits down at the kitchen table and starts diagramming capers. He needs big money fast, he says to me, only I don't see why 'cause he ain't on no hook to any loan sharks — I never known him to be on the vig anyway — and he don't play cards or the ponies and he don't know any expensive women, either."

"Maybe he is planning capers for the sheer pleasure and excitement of . . . capering," O'Bannion ventured.

Waukenfuss shook his head.

"You eat when you're not hungry? You slog out to the little house behind the big house just to read the Sears catalog?"

O'Bannion apologized for the outlandish question.

"No, a con capers because he's got a *reason* to caper. His kid sister needs an eye operation in Denver; his wife needs a roomful of new duds or she's gonna take off with a richer John, his own pockets need lining because all he sees is rich people pigging it down in expensive restaurants and wearing new camel-hair topcoats and gettin' into cars longer than fish. But no con sets up jobs to pass the Lord's good time, and not at Danny's age when the reflexes is shot and the eyes can't see a fist on the end of his nose."

"So you think he's serious about it," said O'Bannion.

"Serious and he's got a good reason why he needs the money."

O'BANNION TURNED up in North Beach at seven. He didn't like boxing and figured to get in, have his rehabilitative chat with Danny Cole and then get out long before the opening bell.

Heine Waukenfuss ushered O'Bannion into a living room that looked like it was trying to win an award for austere destitution. It had a couch which buckled in the middle like a bad horse, a rug whose threads were being

held together on the strength of prayer and a TV any Goodwill driver would have a laughing fit over.

"Danny's in the kitchen, O'Bannion. He's working on a sting to take bank machines."

"Terrific."

Danny Cole, at fifty-eight, looked more fit than an ex-con usually looks after an extended stay at state expense. He was tall and muscular, with a full head of black hair and long, dangling arms. It appeared yacht-basin work agreed with him. As yet, Waukenfuss hadn't told Danny Cole his new-found friend was a police reporter; O'Bannion was merely another ex-con trying to make his mark in the world without drifting back over to the shady side of the street. For the time being, he'd badgered a city editor into removing his picture and byline from atop his daily column.

"Hi, there. Name's Rabbit O'Bannion. Friend of Heine's." The nickname was one O'Bannion had been tagged with in school when, as a borderline member of the track team, he'd earned his letter for setting fast, early paces for the school's premier distance runners so they could set and break records.

"Go to the cops, then," said O'Bannion, already having a pretty solid hunch what Heine would say to that idea.

"You tell a bluecoat *anything* in this town," said Heine, "and he

only begins thinking of ways he can get it turned into a crime so he can make a beautiful bust."

Gradually, as Heine Waukenfuss deftly eliminated all of O'Bannion's most reasonable suggestions, it dawned on him what the array of options was boiling itself down to.

"You talk to him, O'Bannion. You hate cops and you hate P.O.s. Convince him you're on his side and that to take up with crime again at his age would be damn stupid, especially since he's only a tick or two from senility as it is."

"I don't get on well with old people," O'Bannion told him. "They chase me out of public parks. Their dogs menace me for no reason."

"You come by the apartment tonight, Mr. O'Bannion. The Chester Arms Apartments, on Vallejo, just off Columbus Avenue. It's 2-B, second-floor-rear."

"I really don't think I ought to be meddling in —"

"Say, around eight o'clock. You talk to Danny and then we'll watch the fights. We got the cable."

Disturbed at the interruption, Cole pushed back from his paperwork and gave O'Bannion the long, hard once-over.

"Rabbit, huh? You done time, Peter Cottontail?"

"Does a bear like Catholics?"

"Where?"

O'Bannion ran off the names of

four or five state penitentiaries Cole would be hard-pressed to locate on maps, let alone track down to discover whether O'Bannion was lying.

O'Bannion pointed a finger at Cole's handiwork. "That a job in the works?"

"Bank machines," said Cole, in obvious pride. "Nice caper. It could go."

"Kinda tricky?" asked O'Bannion.

"It has wrinkles. See, there's no way you're going to rip off them machines for cash without a fistful of customer four-digit codes. But with your own code, and a little glib talk, you can parlay into some blue-chip merchandise — campers, sports cars, \$20,000 customized vans."

O'Bannion put on an expression of wonder and respect; it did no good to ridicule old men for their foolish dreams and foolhardy schemes when they were all but unable to hear even a thin thread of reason. You had to employ a little trickery yourself, display wonder, show hero-worship and helpless awe.

"How does the scam work exactly?" he said to Cole.

Cole let a pause hang in the air, calculating whether O'Bannion could be trusted. Most cons operated their lives on the very dangerous a-friend-of-yours-is-a-friend-of-mine principle, and Cole was no different. "What you're doing," he began, "is you're



stiffing your bank, not the merchant. First, you open an account, for which the bank extends to you among other services a bank card. The rest is gravy.

"You pick a Friday, after your bank closes. You go to one of its bank machines and stuff it with phony deposits. You enter non-existent amounts of money into your account. The bank machine returns you a fistful of computer transaction acknowledgment slips showing your deposits. See, O'Bannion, across the bottom of the deposit slips, in small print, is a disclaimer that warns-the deposit is subject to bank verification. What the slips *don't say* is that a merchant who is cashing checks for merchandise should be aware the deposit acknowledgment is no guarantee the money has actually been deposited."

O'Bannion knew what came next. He closed his eyes lightly. "Then comes the spending spree," he said to Cole.

"You pick your spots. What do you want. Ski equipment, furniture, scuba gear? A motorcycle, a camper, a van? You look for young, hungry salesmen who look like they'd rather make that big commission than ask any questions. Think of it, O'Bannion. Forty-eight hours of playing superconsumer."

"Think of the jail-time when you're caught," O'Bannion told him.

"A bagatelle. I'm a two-timer,

not a three-timer like Heine. I draw a five-to-ten, do two and a half with collected good time, and I'm back on the streets."

Appealing to Cole's sense of good judgment wasn't going to do much good, but O'Bannion owed it one good shot, anyway.

"What do you make cleaning boats out at the yacht basin, Cole?"

"Two hundred a week, including bonuses when some rich jerk thinks I've done a spiffy job on his fifty-footer. Why?"

"And you're willing to risk regular, steady income on a scheme that might backfire in your face?"

"No, no, O'Bannion. See, the caper is only a part of my master plan."

"And what plan is that?"

Cole grinned. O'Bannion had seen cats grin like that, just before they pounced on grounded birds with their backs turned.

"Can't tell you that, O'Bannion. All I can tell you is it ain't the caper that's important in the overall picture of things."

O'Bannion had done what he'd promised Heine Waukenfuss: he'd tried. There was, however, no dissuading Cole and no stopping him. There was simply the waiting to see if he would be caught.

And then, at the last minute, Danny Cole came to his senses. "It's my face," he told Waukenfuss, as Heine later related it to O'Bannion. "The cops are going

to have those salesmen poring over mug books after my spree is over, poring over them like syrup going over hotcakes. And my name's in the Cs in three different categories for past heroics. No, I'd better back-burner this one a while until I figure a way around my identity crisis."

BUT DANNY COLE'S stove held other burners. Five months following Cole's aborted bank card scam came a fresh brainstorm.

"He's working out this scam he calls the Heir Hunter," Heine Waukenfuss related to O'Bannion. "What he does is he places ads in major daily newspapers all across the country saying he's a professional heir-finder. For a hundred-dollar retainer fee, paid in advance, he'll track down distant relatives anywhere in the world to find out if they're dead or alive, and if they're dead, whether the client is mentioned in the will."

"That sounds like a legitimate enterprise to me," O'Bannion said, knowing instinctively he hadn't been told the full, larcenous story of Danny Cole's latest shady caper. "If that's the bottom line."

"It's the bottom line like a pool hustler plays the game to pass the time and watch the balls roll around the table. The bottom line is, Danny just sits on his scamming butt, collects retainers right and left out of a blind post

office box, and don't hunt down nobody."

"And you want me to talk him out of it," said O'Bannion.

"He hangs out at the Sloop Bar on Cervantes, about a block from the yacht harbor. That's where he takes his calls from the boat owners for cleaning jobs."

"That's a seaman's bar, isn't it?" said O'Bannion. "And a pretty rough place, I've heard."

"What rough?" said Heine. "Jack London types. Very literate, very polite."

"Heine, *come on*. Crime reporting is my *beat*. There's a brawl in that place twice a day over tide times and DiMaggio's batting stats."

"Wear a seaman's watchcap and a black wool sweater and nobody'll give you no trouble," Heine said.

But O'Bannion had a far better idea in lieu of some drunken seaman carving sea chanties in his forehead. He wrote an expose under a fictitious byline about heir finder scams beginning to turn up around the country, which the major wire services picked up and ran the following week, which Danny Cole figured to be simply bad luck and bad timing.

"Coulda had that post office box busting at the seams with greenbacks," he told his roommate, not suspecting O'Bannion's swift and certain journalism had been at the bottom of it all. "No matter. There's millions of

capers that ain't yet been tried. They're floating on thin air, hiding in the backwaters of the human mind, all for the thinking and the bidding up. The big caper, it'll come along of its own sweet time, all right."

The years passed. O'Bannion and Heine Waukenfuss headed off one flawed scheme after another. Crime was, after all, a young man's game, and Danny Cole was getting old, his mind's facility for heinous invention beginning to falter, short circuit, draw to rust. His capers began to run to child's play and the imaginings of fools. He thought a San Francisco bank could easily be robbed by cable car, he believed there was a valid and foolproof way to tunnel into the Federal Reserve Bank, he was convinced all the ticketsellers at Candlestick Park could be heisted with a little speed and timing and the Dodgers in town. By speedboat.

O'Bannion's appointment with retirement came. The *Chronicle* threw him a modest retirement dinner at a Chinatown restaurant. His compatriot conduits through whom thirty years of Bay Area crime had passed in the press-room of the City Jail bestowed on O'Bannion six bottles of passable Scotch, an autographed group photo of the whole sleezy gang and two dozen torn-up poker markers totaling \$120. O'Bannion did not openly weep, but he was deeply touched.

It came as a raw, empty shock to him that retirement was the blood brother of spatial loss. The hands on the clock dissolved, appointments dwindled to trips to a corner grocery for staples, and his schedule reduced itself to eating, sleeping and keeping out of the active world's way. Hearing aged men did it for sport, O'Bannion tried making the elderly scene at public parks. But he loathed pigeons, checkers, exchanging wallet photographs of grandchildren and becoming an ancient extension of park benches. None of that was enterprise, it was the noiselessness of death rattling over his shoulder.

By now, Heine Waukenfuss was sixty-eight and Danny Cole two years his junior. They continued to share the apartment in North Beach, arguing over the raft of eccentricities which come with old age and striking their tenuous peace. Heine's brittle vertebrae went out of synchronization almost daily over one abrupt movement or another, and its quirks forced his retirement as a landscaper. But Danny Cole was still in demand as a boat cleaner, and somewhere along the line he'd also picked up some skills in marine engine repair. He was devising no more spectacularly foolish capers. Both men had mellowed and had apparently drawn themselves out of the mainstream of criminal activity forever and for good. O'Bannion couldn't

have been more pleased and more idle. Every sword in life had two edges, a truth any human could manage and accept with grace if he put his mind to it.

AND THEN CAME the nightmares, Danny Cole's nightmares. The grew in frequency from once a week, to thrice weekly, to every night.

And Heine Waukenfuss began to worry.

"O'Bannion, those nightmares are enough to make your skin crawl like snakes and ice form on your spine."

"Are you able to make-out what's frightening him?"

"Make out? Make out? Who understands a man sixty-six years old? Maybe the Angel of Death just took a seat in a corner of his brain, came in without knocking and sat right down. Maybe it's his time."

"Does he say any words you can understand?" O'Bannion said. "Some tipoff as to what's hounding him?"

"Some nights, he lets out a shriek like the end of the world is tomorrow at six a.m., bolts up in his bed and begins to scream 'Reliance! Reliance! Reliance!' to high heaven. Now, I keep a pitcher of ice water in the refrigerator for when he begins to go crazy and I can dump it on him."

"Reliance," O'Bannion repeated to himself half-aloud. "Maybe he means self-reliance. Old age

can bring a great deal of guilt over dependency. Maybe he's just reminding himself not to be a burden on others."

"He doesn't say *self*, just says *reliance*."

"What else does Danny say in his nightmares?" O'Bannion pressed.

"Not much. I don't let him say too much before the ice water. Oh. He sometimes'll blurt out 'Kenneth'll be the curse of me! Kenneth's my life-long curse!'"

"Either of you know anyone named Kenneth?"

"Not me. And Danny, he never mentioned any Kenneth. Could be somebody down at the Sloop Bar, could be some guy he works with down at the yacht harbor. Could be that guy in the black hood sitting there at the back of his mind."

It came to O'Bannion that there was no accounting for the ravages of senility, no timing them. Some men lived out their whole lives to the final breath with a grip on the real world as firm as a vise, while others far their junior slipped into that confusing, contrary world almost before they had begun to live.

"What do you know about Danny's life before the two of you hooked up?" O'Bannion asked.

"A con wouldn't confide to another con his favorite sandwich," Heine told O'Bannion. "It's the life behind the walls makes you tight-mouthed. Hear

no, see no, speak no."

"What about a family?"

"Danny never mentioned any family. If you're a black sheep, like maybe Danny is with all the time he done, all those binding ties probably got cut years back."

"Well, did he ever mention anything about the time between his release from The Rock and the day the two of you met?"

"I think he said he spent some time up north. Oregon, Washington, British Columbia. Yeh, I remember how he had this whole hassle about getting his records transferred and latching onto a P.O. in Seattle. They don't like you leaving your county of record. They don't like ex-cons creating paperwork. The only time they like ex-cons is when they get tossed back into the joint again."

"You let me know if the nightmares get worse," O'Bannion told Heine Waukenfuss. "And you let me know if his nightmares begin making any sense."

"One other sort of queer thing, O'Bannion."

"What's that?" O'Bannion asked.

"He goes to the library. The main one, down at the Civic Center."

"The library."

"Right. I followed him a couple times. I figured maybe he was hooked up with some jerk ex-con and was going to see about doing some crimes."

"So?"

"So, he goes to the room where they have all the out-of-town newspapers. He stakes out a corner table and then spends an hour or so going over newspapers."

"Any special ones?" O'Bannion asked.

"The major cities. Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago, Miami, New York. Ones like that. The big twenty. I don't get close enough so Danny knows I'm tailing him, but I asks the guy behind the counter who gives out the papers."

"What's he look for in those papers?"

"Who's to say?" answered Heine. "The baseball scores, the funnies. Dirty pictures. No way to tell."

"You ask Danny about the newspapers?"

"And get my head tore off? He's a basket case these days as it is. Who's to say I ask him and he don't pick me up and chuck me out the window? That's a fifty-foot drop, O'Bannion and we oldtimers just don't hapen to bounce so well any more."

O'Bannion, though he wanted to help Danny Cole up and out of his misery, didn't feel it was his place to meddle. So a man was experiencing nightmares. Nightmares came and went. Cole would escape their grip in time.

It was somewhere during this period that O'Bannion lost strict track on the two ex-con roomies and their odd-couple life in North

Beach. Heine Waukenfuss' silence told O'Bannion that very probably his nefarious roommate was learning that his life of crime was passing and any legendary feats of illegality would fall to men with quicker hands, faster feet and minds younger and more facile than his own.

A year passed, then two. O'Bannion had struck his edgy peace with retirement. He beach-combed, he fed animals at the zoo, he sat in on the more bizarre and amusing cases of the superior court.

He also maintained his one major hobby: the collecting and reading of books on crime, particularly legendary crime. There was endless fascination and good humor to be found in certain outlandishly conceived crimes and their reckless and half-brained perpetrators, characters and events more audacious than any fiction-writer could create out of thin air.

It was one of these obscure finds hiding on a lower shelf at the rear of a second-hand bookshop on Telegraph Hill that grew to hold a special fascination for O'Bannion. It was titled *Great Crimes of the Pacific Northwest*, by an author O'Bannion did not know. There were wondrous backwoods tales, ingenious gold train thefts as well as more recent, metropolitan crimes.

One of the latter interested O'Bannion more than any of the

others. The crime took place in Seattle in 1954, during a three-day Washington's Birthday weekend in late February. It was a crime of utter daring and surprise and easily the grandest heist the city had ever known.

On the rim of the city's skid road district stood a seven-story building of worn stone the color and texture of elephant hide. It was easily fifty years old. Its entrance was a gaudy, elaborate arcade which doubled as the lobby for the Dream, one of Seattle's first motion-picture theaters. The building's topmost floor was a brothel, its basement a bootleg lounge. The Merchants National Bank was also on the first floor, its steel bank vaults a floor below the cocktail lounge in a sub-basement. Once each decade at least, one gang of thugs or other had made attempts to blow the vault's main steel chamber door. None succeeded. The vault was considered by dozens of experts around the country as being impenetrable, attested to by the long string of burglars who had been caught and marched off to jail over the years.

The building was a scant two blocks from the police headquarters. And if that were not irony enough, the thieves picked their night of crime to coincide with the city's annual Policeman's Ball. The date was February 20, 1954. Their planning had been not only perfect, but poetic as well.

As policemen and their wives and girlfriends supped, sipped and waltzed only blocks away, the burglars silently entered the building through a rear door just off the Post Street alley, lugging with them oxygen and acetylene tanks, hammers, drills, punches, lights and extension cords, chisels, crow-bars, air hammers and assorted bits and torches.

Once safely inside with their equipment, the thieves moved quietly through a furnace room, then down a set of stairs which led to the sub-basement. At the front of the building, in the bootleg bar bustling with gaiety, no one heard a sound.

They burned open the thin steel doors of the vault-room office and came face-to-face with their major obstacle: two walls, the first eight inches of solid brick, the second a half-foot of steel. Sledges, picks and air hammers ate the brick away in scant minutes, making a hole just large enough to admit the burglars and the gear they would use on the steel wall, the torches and the tanks.

Blind estimates made later by both police and bank officials had them battling this obstacle at least five hours, at most twelve. They did a butcher's job on the steel, not cutting through it but melting it in a four-foot irregular hole. Little due had to be paid to artistry. Through was through.

Inside the main vault they feasted their eyes on 1,640 safe

deposit box doors with varying sizes and types of locks. Randomly, ecstatically, they began serving them with blows from sledgehammers and picks, applying pipe wrenches to some of the locks which would not be felled by the former. They were after only cash and they found it in heavy abundance. One box contained \$18,000, another \$32,000. Thousands here, hundreds there, box after box after box. Auditors and insurance agents later revealed the odd and random possession taken for its stunning beauty or worth: nuggets of gold, strings of matched pearls, pairs of diamond earrings and batches of government and municipal bonds. Only a meager 416 boxes had been broken into by the burglars in an obviously well-designed and disciplined heist in which it was of utmost importance for their well-being to bust inside, load up with as much loot as they could conveniently carry, and then get out.

The bank did not reopen until the following Tuesday, and when it did, an entire city reeled backward over the audaciousness and the incredible loss. Much of the loss went unreported by deposit box holders whose hands were tied by holdings gone unmentioned to the Internal Revenue Service. Known and reported losses easily surpassed a half-million dollars, but police suspected the actual take at six times that figure. No one knew how many thieves



were involved, or who. It would become the blueprint for the perfect crime and it would go unsolved.

Swiftly the bits and pieces fell into place in O'Bannion's brain. The date of this monumental heist coincided perfectly with that block of years Danny Cole had been out of prison and until the time he'd met up with Heine Waukenfuss in San Francisco's North Beach.

And so, too, were now explained the nightmare babblings of Danny Cole. It was not self-reliance by which he was haunted as an aging man. And his nightmares had nothing whatever to do with anyone named Kenneth. His nightmares had to do with crime.

The evidence was right before O'Bannion's eyes, in *Great Crimes of the Pacific Northwest*. The building in which the bank and its lucrative vaults had been housed was named the Reliance Building. And the hotel set on the floors between the first-floor speakeasy and the top-floor brothel was called the Kenneth Hotel. The deceased Danny Cole, the happy-go-lucky Irishman boat cleaner with one punch remaining on his three-time-loser card, was one of the heisters of the Merchants National Bank in Seattle, one of the unnumbered several who had gone unnamed and uncaught.

of fog that made its exact arrival difficult to tell. O'Bannion searched down Van Ness for the yacht harbor, driving like a psychologist looking for clues to the gifted child. The yacht harbor was gone, merely something faith told you was still there. The red neon of the Sloop Lounge shone like anemic blood moving in fits and starts through the thinnest of blood vessels. O'Bannion was surprised at the number of cars packed into its side parking lot and lined on the street in front.

Walking into the bar was a little like walking out to a concourse at the Superbowl at halftime. Danny Cole, despite his lifelong obsession with crime, had made a lot of friends along the yacht harbor and most of them seemed genuinely interested in paying their final respects to a friend.

"Springstad did a good job on him. Corpses usually turn out to look like wax fruit, but Springstad did a good job."

"A peaceful smile, but with a wry little twist to it."

"Danny looks good in a suit, too."

"But not stuffy."

"Definitely not."

"You think he'd be pleased with a wake for himself?"

"Does a dog go woof? A wake is the only proper way to show respect for the dead. Yes, he'd be pleased."

O'Bannion snaked his way through the thick crowd. Danny

DAWN CAME with a solid wall

Cole was laid out on the oak bartop, on a bed of paper sham-rocks, just as Heine Waukenfuss had said he would be. There was an untouched jigger of Irish whisky set on the bar next to his left ear. The crowd had been correct in praising the mortician's careful restoration; Danny Cole looked more asleep than dead, as though the drinking and revelry had been too much for a man his age and he'd simply stretched out on the top of the bar for a nap.

O'Bannion, then, felt a hand fall softly on his shoulder.

"Looks real natural, don't he?" said Heine Waukenfuss. "You stand him up, open his eyes and clamp a drink in his hand and a hundred people would walk up to him and start a conversation."

"Speaking of conversations, you and I really ought to have ours before too much more Murphy's gets poured," O'Bannion told him.

"This sounds pretty serious."

"It is, Heine. Let's find a corner booth where we won't be disturbed."

They took a half-filled bottle of Murphy's to a rear booth near the kitchen where O'Bannion's words would be partially drowned in the clatter. O'Bannion wasted no time in telling Heine Waukenfuss the outlandish saga of the Merchants National Bank heist in Seattle in 1954, impressing upon him the high possibility that his longtime friend, Danny Cole, died a man

with a nefarious past more remarkable than most.

"The words he spoke in his sleep," O'Bannion went on. "Reliance and Kenneth. They're the names of the building and the hotel where the Merchants National Bank was housed."

For a full minute, Heine Waukenfuss didn't speak. O'Bannion could see the enormity gradually filling his eyes like air being blown into a party balloon.

"H-how much did you say they got in the heist? I mean, I want to make sure I'm hearing what I'm hearing."

"A cool million," O'Bannion repeated, "maybe two. Maybe... more."

"And you think it's..."

"...somewhere in the Bay Area in a bank safe deposit box," O'Bannion said. "For which you now have the key, the one Danny left you in that matchbox on his bookshelf."

Heine Waukenfuss reached into a pocket of his trousers, brought out a fist and opened it on the oversized key. "This one."

O'Bannion nodded. "That one."

"O'Bannion, I am confused. If Danny had all this loot on hand, what's he doing planning capers every night for the last ten years?"

"I'm not sure, Heine, but I think the capers and all those mysterious trips he took to the library point in the same direction."

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is this. I think there was a major slip-up in the Merchants National Bank heist in 1954."

"But it was the perfect heist," said Waukenfuss. "Didn't you tell me it was the A-number-one perfect job?"

"Sure. Perfect in the sense that nobody got identified or caught in connection with it and none of the loot was ever recovered. But, I think there was an *inside* slip-up."

Waukenfuss bolted down a full five ounces of Murphy's and refilled his glass. "O'Bannion, I been following on the heels of everything you said, only you just lost me. How do you mean an inside slip-up?"

"We can't be sure until that safe deposit is opened. But I've a hunch Danny got away with most of the loot from that Seattle caper. Maybe they were all going to meet later to divide it equally. Or maybe Danny just pulled a fast one. But he got the lion's share of it. That's why the capers and why the sudden interest in old newspaper files."

"O'Bannion, please. Don't do this to me. You're like a mystery novel with the last four pages ripped out."

"Danny planned the capers," O'Bannion explained, "because he desperately needed a valid reason for a sudden display of wealth. If he could pull off a job big enough and then spread the

news of it around to his cronies and pals, he wouldn't have to begin making up a pile of lame excuses if he went on a spending spree. Which brings us to the old newspaper files he started to become so addicted to."

"Obituary notices," said Heine Waukenfuss, now catching up to O'Bannion's thinking. "Those guys he did the Merchants Bank job with, they're all in their fifties and sixties now. If he could be sure he outlived all of them, he could begin spending that loot like a looped sailor in Long Beach on a Saturday night."

"Danny may even have changed his name, perhaps even his identity."

"You mean plastic surgery?"

"Anything's possible where a couple of million dollars of other people's money is concerned," said O'Bannion.

Heine Waukenfuss was now drinking more slowly, more thoughtfully. "I guess this is about where my test of honor comes in," he said to O'Bannion after another lengthy pause.

"Front and center, Heine."

Heine Waukenfuss picked the safe deposit box key up from the table and cradled it in his palm. "I guess the wisest, most honorable course to take is to turn this key over to S.F.P.D. and tell them what you've just told me."

"And the safest course, as well."

"Of course," Waukenfuss

mused, "It wouldn't hurt nothin' to take just one peek into that box to see how much of that loot Danny actually got away with."

"Two things wrong with that course of action," said O'Bannion. "First, you may be able to forge Danny's signature to get into the box, but it will be dated. And a dead man isn't likely to make a trip to his bank."

"And second?"

"Second, when the police discover someone other than Danny Cole has been inside that box, and it boils down to you, you won't be able to prove you didn't take something *out of it*."

"More hot water. I catch your drift."

"And if you make the wrong

decision, Heine, I have to warn you that you may have me to deal with as one of your adversaries."

"One of? Who else?"

"Your conscience and the entire San Francisco police force."

They got up from the table and went back to the bar where Danny Cole reclined in sartorial grace, a millionaire who hadn't been able to take it with him.

Heine Waukenfuss raised his glass in a toast and O'Bannion followed suit.

"Looks like all I've fallen heir to is a package of grief."

"Looks like," said O'Bannion.

"And the funny thing about it is," said Heine Waukenfuss, "Danny probably isn't even Irish."

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# Down In The Valley



by James M. Reasoner

"Give me your tired, your poor . . ."  
And your most proficient killers?

**FORTY-THREE MEN** huddled in the back of the truck, cold and afraid. There was no moon, and the canvas flaps on the side cut out what little starlight there was. It was pitch black inside, and none of the men knew where they were headed.

Ramon didn't care. He was in the United States now, and that was all that mattered to him. Now he would never have to go back to the little village in the hills. He shifted his shoulders against the wall of the truck and closed his eyes.

There were whispered conversations all around him, as the ner-

vous men tried to ease the tension. No one talked to Ramon, though. He had always been a quiet one, preferring to let his knife speak for him when it had to. That was why he was here now; his knife had one day been too eloquent and left a dead man on the floor of the cantina. Now he was on his way to a new life in a new country.

Up in the cab, the driver rubbed his neck and squinted down the path of the headlights. He was a big man named Flood who thought about neither the past nor the future, but only about the money he had coming when he got his load of wetbacks to San Antonio.

Flood didn't care about the legality of what he was doing. The men who had set up the pipeline paid well.

Farther down the road, two men sat drowsily in a parked car. It was a battered old Plymouth, and anyone passing by on the highway wouldn't have given it a second look. The two men inside had been sitting there for four hours, waiting.

Ramon felt sleep easing into his head as the truck rolled along. He let it come in gladly. The last seventy-two hours had been busy.

In his dream, he woke up. He got out of bed and went to the door of his hut. Down at the end of the valley, the sun was creeping up over the hills. Ramon enjoyed watching the sunrise; he liked the pretty colors. But he did not like going to work in the fields, and that was the thing that the sunrise signaled.

"Ramon?" It was a sleepy murmur from the bed. He returned to it and stroked the glossy black hair spread out on the pillow. It was hard for him to make his hand be gentle.

"Go back to sleep, Elena," he said quietly.

"... love you," the woman said, and snuggled back down into the covers. Ramon went outside, wondering briefly why he could not say it as easily as she could.

WHILE RAMON SLEPT and dreamed, Flood felt his own eye-

lids getting heavier. He was glad the truck had a radio, even if it could only get one station. He switched it on and turned it up loud, not caring if it disturbed his passengers.

The twangy chords of country music made him more alert and even brought back some memories. He wasn't one for reminiscing, but there was one moment he liked to relive every now and then.

He had come home from the oil field covered with dirt and grease, as usual, and announced, "I'm not goin' back to that place. I've had it with roughneckin'."

His wife was feeding the baby and watching the Grand Ole Opry on TV. She looked up at him and pushed the hair out of her face. "Then how are we supposed to eat from now on?"

He opened a can of beer and said, "That's your problem, not mine." Before she could start screaming, he went on, "I'm getting out of here."

"You're leavin' me?" she shrilled. "Leavin' the baby?"

"You got it, ace. You always were real quick on the uptake."

She put the baby down and it started to cry. She ignored it and caught at his arm. "You can't do that! What'll we do?"

He shook her hand off and headed for the bedroom to pack. She followed close behind, face mottled with fury. She yelled, "Just where do you think you're



goin', anyway?"

He pivoted and started to slap her, but he stopped the blow when she cringed back. "I'm going far away from here, just as far as I can get from your whining and nagging. I want something better." His voice lowered, became more intense. "I want plenty of money and fancy women and good whiskey, and I won't ever have none of that if I stay here!"

Tears rolled down his wife's face as she sobbed, "But what about me and the baby? What about your responsibilities?"

He had to laugh. "Honey, we don't even speak the same language anymore!"

Well, he had more money now, but the whiskey and the women still weren't always that easy to come by. He chuckled to himself in the dark cab. Anything was better than living with that woman.

He barely glanced at the old Plymouth as he barreled past it.

INSIDE THE CAR, one of the men suddenly nudged the other and said, "There he goes, Dave. Right on time."

The man called Dave wasn't sleepy any more. He reached under the dash and picked up a microphone. "This is Unit 101. Suspect vehicle just passed our position, proceeding north. You can start closing the net, Barney. We'll be right behind him."

Even while he was speaking, the other man had started the car and

pulled out onto the highway. The Plymouth started to pick up speed.

THE TRUCK BOUNCED slightly as it went over a rough spot in the road. Ramon woke up, and in that split-second when he didn't remember where he was, he almost cried out. His fingers instinctively sought the handle of his blade. But then he recognized the rocking motion of the truck and settled back into a more comfortable position.

He wondered what the Fates held for him in the big American city. What should he become? He didn't know yet; all he knew was that he didn't want to work in the fields, long hours of labor that made the body ache so. He had had enough of that.

Up front, Flood moved around on the seat, trying to find a new way to sit. He had been driving for several hours and was getting tired. His right leg hurt from trying to maintain a constant pressure on the gas pedal. His employers had made it clear. He was to be very careful not to break any traffic laws.

Flood's eyes moved all the time, from the mirror to the panel and back again. This time, when they flicked to the mirror, they saw a pair of lights behind him in the night.

The radio in the Plymouth crackled and said, "One-oh-one, this is one-oh-four. We're all in position, Dave. He's your baby

now, and you can goose him any time you want."

Dave acknowledged the transmission and then said, "Okay, Jack, let's move up on him." The Plymouth put on more speed.

**FLOOD KEPT GLANCING** uneasily at the mirror as the lights drew closer. He was tempted to speed up, but he was already going the speed limit, and he had his orders. Then a red light suddenly flashed into existence on top of the following car, and Flood felt his breath catch in his throat. His foot automatically tromped down on the accelerator.

Ramon felt the lurch as the truck picked up speed and wondered what had happened. He hoped there was nothing wrong. The man to whom he had given all his money had promised that there would be no trouble.

Flood was cursing to himself as he gripped the steering wheel tight. This was supposed to be a perfect setup. Someone along the pipeline must have fouled up and spilled the whole operation to save his own skin.

This was a flat stretch of road, sided by plains covered with scrubby growth. Flood was pushing the truck as hard as he could, but it had been built to be useful and inconspicuous, not fast. The car behind was steadily closing the gap.

A smaller road crossed the highway about a mile ahead.

Lights blazed on at the crossroad as the truck approached. Police cars clustered in the middle of the intersection.

Flood groaned. There went his last real chance. All he could do now was get the truck off the road, abandon it, and hope he could slip off into the brush on foot.

The men in the back of the truck were gabbling chaotically. They asked each other what was going on, but on one had any answers. A few of them yelled in fright as the truck suddenly swung off the highway and started bouncing wildly across the rough ground.

Flood had to fight the wheel as it tried to tear itself out of his hands. Sweat dripped down his face. It would take a miracle to get him out of this.

**DAVE STOOD BESIDE** the Plymouth and watched the tail-lights of the truck. A searchlight lanced out from one of the police cars and pinned it momentarily in a bright beam. The driver had to realize the hopelessness of his situation.

Ramon could feel his heart pounding inside his chest as he was thrown back and forth by the gyrations of the truck. There was bedlam all around him now. Something was very wrong, and he was afraid that he would never be a rich man.

Brush slapped against the fields. Flood had decided that he would jump and take his chances,

letting the truck go on by itself. He was fumbling for the door handle when the front wheels suddenly dropped off into empty air. Flood screamed.

The drop lasted only a split-second as the truck landed right-side-up on a narrow dirt road that sliced through the fields. Flood fought down his panic and spun the speering wheel desperately. This was an unexpected chance, and he was going to grab it if he could. The wheels suddenly caught in the soft dirt and sent the truck shooting down the road.

Dave heard the truck's engine roar, saw its lights pick up speed. He struck the fender of the Plymouth with a fist and said bitterly, "Damnit! Where's that helicopter they promised us? Get some men over on that other road!"

Flood reached down and cut his lights off. It was a good gamble. The road seemed to be flat and straight. Running dark would make him that much harder to find.

Ramon's heart was tripping wildly. When the truck had lurched downward, his spirit had plummeted along with it. His ambitions had vanished, leaving only a frantic desire for life. Now that the truck was running more smoothly, he was drawing slow, deep breaths and trying to calm himself. His companions were still in an uproar around him. His nerves were so tight that it was all

he could do not to strike out at them.

FOUR HOURS LATER, the truck rolled down a back street between dark warehouses in San Antonio. Flood had eluded the pursuers, getting lost in the process, but he had finally found his way back to a road he knew. He was behind schedule, but he had delivered his cargo.

The men in the back of the truck were quiet now, some of them sleeping an exhausted sleep. Others, like Ramon, were still awake, beginning again to think about their new lives in this country.

Flood found the warehouse he was looking for. He pulled up in front of the big doors and tapped his horn in a signal. A moment later, the doors swung open. The truck rolled forward into the darkness.

The doors swung shut behind it. Lights came on. Flood shut the engine off and dropped to the concrete floor.

Two men in business suits walked toward him. They had bland faces and very hard eyes. One of them said, "You're late. Is the freight in good condition?"

"Yeah," Flood replied. "We had some trouble, but nothing was hurt. Some cops were waiting for me down south of here, but I got away from 'em. I think you got a leak in your pipeline."

The two men exchanged glances while Flood went to the back of the

truck and unlocked it. He rolled the door up and snapped, "Okay, you lousy wetbacks, get outta there."

Ramon didn't understand the man's words, but he was very glad to see light again. With the others, he climbed out of the truck and stood uneasily on the hard floor.

Men in suits, magnificent suits like none Ramon had ever seen, looked the group over. He wondered if they were there to hire workers. He would like to work for men like this.

The man who had spoken turned to Flood and said, "This will have to be the last load. If our setup is compromised, we can't afford to keep on with it. We'll have to cover our trail."

Flood shrugged. "Okay by me, although I hate to see it go. Until tonight, it was easy money."

"You don't understand, Flood. You know too many things. You know too much about us."

The second man started to reach inside his coat.

Ramon still didn't understand what was being said, but he knew the look of fear that suddenly sprang into the eyes of the man who had driven the truck.

Flood didn't wait to see what was coming. He knew what kind of men these were, and he knew what would happen next unless he got away. With a yell, he bulled between them and started to sprint toward the warehouse doors, past the group of huddled

aliens. One of the men behind him yelled, "Stop him!"

Ramon understood looks of fear and anger and desperation. And he knew when one man had more power, more to offer, than another.

Flood saw the dark-faced figure step out in front of him, and he started to shout, "Outta my way, damn y—"

Ramon's knife spoke silently and interrupted him, flickering in and out brightly as it laced three neat holes in Flood's body.

The cold concrete rasped on Flood's face as he fell. He hugged himself, feeling the roughness, and then, for him, there was nothing more.

Ramon put his knife away. Everyone was looking at him, even the two men in the wonderful suits. One of them knelt by the body on the floor, while the other began to speak in Ramon's language.

"You are very gifted with a blade, my friend. Such talent is rare."

Ramon bowed his head in honest humility.

"Talent should not be wasted," the man went on. "Would you like to work for me? I can find many such jobs for you to do." He looked at the body as he said it.

There were the beginnings of a smile on Ramon's face as he nodded shyly.

This was a wonderful country, after all!

# STIFF COMPETITION

by John Ball

A SURPRISING NUMBER of books in the last few weeks have dealt with the President or high level officials of government. Apparently the backwash of Watergate is still with us; in at least one case the disguise is very thin indeed.

John Lutz, whose *Bonegrinder* was impressive, has come up with *Lazarus Man*, the account of a disgraced President and his immediate associates. One of these men, who served four years in prison for his part in the scandal, seeks retribution by stalking the other former officials. As he disposes of them, one by one, he learns of the plans of the former President to worm his way back into power. The book starts out rather slowly, but builds considerably before it is over. Most of the Nixon associates are easily identifiable, as are their wives. (Morrow, \$8.95.)

☆☆☆

A remarkably fine aviation thriller is Austin Ferguson's *Random Track to Peking*. The author, who is an airline pilot, does a brilliant job of pacing his story and mixing his ingredients to the point where the recently retired ace pilot is left with only one desperate alternative to get out of an intolerable situation. This one will keep you fervently reading from the moment that an engine explodes on a DC-10 in mid-Pacific. To complicate matters, the Vice-President is on board, and there is an ultrasensitive cargo. It was written and published before the Chicago DC-10 tragedy in May, 1979. Very highly recommended. (Morrow, \$8.95.)

☆☆☆

London's prestigious Detection Club, which is by invitation only, has produced a new anthology *Verdict of Thirteen*, only the third

publication by the club since its founding in 1932. All of the stories by members of the club were especially written for this book. After an introduction by Julian Symons, the fun begins and the quality is of a very high order. The authors include P.D. James, Gwendoline Butler, Dick Francis, Michael Gilbert, Christianna Brand, Michael Innes, Patricia Highsmith, Celia Fremlin, H.R.F. Keating, Michael Underwood, Ngaio Marsh, Peter Dickinson, and Julian Symons. This is a virtual Who's Who of British crime writing and a memorable book in every way. (Harper and Row, \$9.95.)

☆☆☆

*Death Stalk* by Bob Langley has the earmarks of a first novel. It starts out at an exciting pace, but then slows until there is a contest for survival in the bitter cold winter of Scotland. Although there is a good policeman in the cast, it is largely an adventure story in the tradition of Desmond Bagley. Despite the sagging middle pace, a commendable job and a good story. We will look for Mr. Langley's next with interest. (Doubleday, \$7.95.)

☆☆☆

The President-elect is a principal character in *Pandora Man* by Kerry Newcomb and Frank

Schaefer. A good deal of suspension of disbelief is called for here as the President-elect and all of his associates are the targets of a planned slaughter at a picnic so that a double can be substituted to assume the Presidency. Chicano Tom Salcedo escapes and then fights to uncover the truth. There are some good moments, but it is difficult to believe that a man well enough known to be elected President could be successfully impersonated by a ringer, persuasive as the authors are with this idea. (Morrow, \$8.95.)

☆☆☆

E.C. Ferrars is a well-established mystery author with a long list of titles to her credit. *In at the Kill*, her latest, hardly adds to her reputation. The story is routine, the heroine is almost unbelievably stupid, and the book is so hastily written that wrong character names are used. (Doubleday, \$7.95.)

☆☆☆

A belated review copy of *Acts of Mercy* by Bill Prozini and Barry N. Malzberg takes us into the White House once more. This time the President is nearing the end of his first term under intense attack by an ambitious senator who wants to replace him as his party's candidate. Political suspense is the theme of the book,

but it has a notable virtue — an ending that is probably unique in the literature. The unexpected solution can be compared to the memorable one in Agatha Christie's *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, but it is not the same one. By any standard it is a stunning surprise, although it is fairly clued. Much superior to some other recent "presidential" books. (Putnam, \$8.95.)

☆☆☆

A timely, but not too exciting, entry is *The Caliph Intrigue* by Leigh James. The story is concerned with the Arabs and their vast financial resources. Once more the battleground is Washington, which the author obviously knows well. Unfortunately, there is a good deal of thrashing about without a great deal of forward thrust as the plot unfolds. The suspicion persists that a good crisp outline might have added considerably to the development sections of this book. It is definitely readable, but misses being outstanding. (Dodd Mead, \$7.95.)

☆☆☆

A debut novel is Timothy Child's *Cold Turkey*, a private eye story that introduces one-armed Peter Stokes, who works for a security service that is otherwise not impressive for its efficiency. When some of the company's minimum wage employees meet

death on the job, Stokes goes into action. Unfortunately there is the ancient cliché of the hostile police lieutenant who is stupid in the bargain, but the author overcomes this to provide a cleanly plotted and generally well-told tale. (Harper and Row, \$8.95.)

☆☆☆

Espionage fans will enjoy *The Unicorn Group* by Lee R. Bobker. A highly select special unit within the CIA is being decimated by someone who knows too much about its activities. The only drawback is a plot so complicated it is possible to get lost in the many wheels within wheels before the truth is revealed. There are some very chilling moments, but the author should note that the Star Ferry in Hong Kong carries passengers only and does not handle cars. (Morrow, \$9.95.)

☆☆☆

For good lively mystery reading it is hard to beat a well-done police procedural. Under the unlikely title *Live Bait* the prolific Bill Knox has come up with a very good one laid in Scotland. It deals with the elite Scottish Crime Squad and is full of good background, well developed characters, and plenty of action. For a "good read" in the criminal vein, this is a definite winner. (Doubleday, \$7.95.)



# Where Is Danny Storm?

by Edward D. Hoch

The couple in the cottage down the road were none of my business, to begin with. It was too bad the situation couldn't stay that way.

DRIVING ACROSS the canal bridge onto Cape Cod on that first weekend in June, I wondered what the cottage would be like this summer without Margo. I'd never spent any time here without her, and the thought of the lonely weeks ahead seemed bearable only when I remembered the book contract that nestled in my briefcase.

Funny thing — I'd never imagined that Margo would leave me while my books were successful. She enjoyed the Manhattan literary scene with its autographings and cocktail parties, enjoyed being pointed out in Brentano's as the wife of bestselling novelist Clay Wunder. But last year we'd gone to Hollywood while I did the screenplay for *Devil Dance*, and Margo found herself having an affair with the film's second unit director. He was ten years younger than me and wore his shirt open to the waist. Against the California lifestyle, I couldn't compete.

We'd been married six years when it happened, and looking back I was sorry now that things had gone so badly. I was sorry I'd been indifferent toward her family — I'd met her mother only once and had avoided meeting her kid sister at all. But most of all I was sorry about the way it ended. As I drove up to the cottage on the road east of Yarmouth, I had a special twinge of regret. It would be my first summer alone there.

But this was the summer of the Big Novel, and all else was secondary. On my first day at the cottage I aired the place out and did some shopping at the local store. I picked up some accumulated mail, including a padded book mailer I'd been expecting. I knew what was in that, so I tossed it unopened in the bottom drawer of my desk. Then I settled down at the typewriter. I'd always used the tiny den for my writing because the window gave a distant view along the gently curving shoreline.

There was only one other house in sight, a cottage down the road that Doc Samuels and his wife usually rented out for June and July.

I was mildly interested to see that it was already occupied this early in June. There was a rusty blue station wagon parked in front, and I noticed a young fellow with long hair and a beard cutting the grass in jeans and a baggy blue shirt. Later on I saw a pretty blond girl in shorts and halter come out and get in the car. A couple of hippies, I decided, but rich hippies if they could afford the rent.

I noticed them from a distance several times during the following days. They were never together. He cut the grass or worked on the car while she stayed inside, or she sunned herself alone on the beach. It seemed an odd sort of relationship, but that was none of my business. Once, passing the cottage while he was carrying in groceries from the car. I said hello and tried to chat. His reply was a grunt as he walked past me into the cottage.

I had better luck with the girl. I met her in town one day during my second week on the Cape, when I'd driven up the road to Yarmouth to purchase the Sunday papers.

"Aren't you renting the Samuels place?" I asked when chance threw us together in the cashier's line.

"That's right. Till the end of

July." She was just as pretty close up, with blue eyes and soft blond hair that went well with her tall, boyish body.

"I've seen you and your husband around the place." She was wearing a wedding ring so I felt it was a safe assumption. "My name's Clay Wunder. I have the next cottage down the road in this direction. The blue one."

"I'm Grace Storm," she said extending her hand. "Glad to meet you. My husband is Danny."

"Beautiful weather, isn't it?" She was probably still in her twenties, with a good tan that told me she'd been enjoying the sun.

"Fantastic! We were up in Provincetown last June and it rained the whole month."

We paid for our papers and I strolled out to the rusty station wagon with her. "If you ever need to borrow a cup of sugar or anything, remember I'm just down the road."

"Thanks, I'll remember." She climbed into the car and shot off toward home while I was still standing there. When I drove by the place her husband Danny was watering the roses. He look up as I passed but didn't wave. I wondered if that shirt and jeans were the only clothes he owned.

I quickly fell into the routine of picking up my mail and the paper in the morning and then settling in to write for the rest of the day and into the night. I was averaging about fifteen hundred words a

day — not much, but if I kept up the pace it would give me a 135,000-word first draft by Labor Day. It was toward the end of my third week, when I'd just come back with the mail, that I saw Grace Storm walking across the sandy lot that separated our cottages.

"How've you been?" I called out, shielding my eyes from the morning sun.

"Fine!" When she got a bit nearer she said, "You didn't tell me you were Clay Wunder the writer."

"You've learned my awful secret."

"I've read all your books — or all the thrillers, anyway. That one about the submarine under the North Pole."

"*Angel on Ice*. I was quite pleased with that."

"And the mechanical hawk —"

"Say, you *have* read them!"

She smiled and looked pleased with herself. "Are you working on a new one?"

"My publisher likes to call it a Big Novel, in capital letters. Not a thriller, though naturally they hope it'll sell just as many copies and maybe get me a major book club selection as well."

"That's great! I'll be watching for it!"

Feeling I should change the subject, I said, "We don't get many folks your age staying for most of the summer. Is your husband a teacher?"

"Danny? No, he's between jobs right now." It was her turn to make a switch. "One thing that brought me over was to ask you a favor. Would you still have last Sunday's *New York Times* around? I noticed you buying it at the store one day."

"Sure thing!" I went into the house and returned with a stack of papers. "If you can sort it out, I think it'll all be there. I'm finished with it, so you can keep it."

"Thanks a lot!"

I watched her stroll back to her cottage. Her husband was nowhere in sight, but I had the impression she'd gotten the paper for him.

MY NEXT ENCOUNTER with Grace Storm came a few days later. In order to get some exercise I'd taken to strolling along the beach in the morning before settling down at the typewriter. This day, when the Cape was beginning to fill up with the crowds of late June, I especially avoided the road traffic. And so I came upon Grace smoking a cigarette and sunning herself down near the water.

As soon as I saw her try to cup the cigarette out of sight I knew what it was. "You don't have to hide it from me," I said.

"That's good." She took a long drag on the joint and passed it to me. "Want a puff? It's good grass."

"No thanks. I'm not against it. I just don't smoke anything."

"It relaxes me. Some days I need it, you know?"

"I know."

"I thought most writers were into drugs."

"Not the ones I know. Most of them are still on booze."

We chatted a bit more before I continued my walk down the beach. Certainly the presence of a single marijuana cigarette on Cape Cod in the summer was nothing unusual, but somehow it bothered me. After that I began to pay more than the usual attention to the comings and goings of my neighbors down the road. I still never saw them together, and when I saw him it was usually at night, going out alone in the blue station wagon. The thought crossed my mind that he might be connected with the drug traffic in some way, but I dismissed that as unlikely. For one thing, he looked the part too much. I couldn't imagine a real narcotics dealer with long hair and a beard, dressing in sloppy shirt and jeans. It was like a signal to the police. Still, it was odd that he seemed to go out of his way to avoid me.

I saw little of either of them over the long July 4th weekend when the summer tourist business was at its peak. Sticking close to my typewriter I managed to write ten thousand words in four days. I was ahead of schedule, and that was reason to celebrate. More reason came when the next day's mail brought a fat royalty check from

my publisher.

It was late on Thursday evening, after the holiday weekend, when I heard a pounding on the front door as I was thinking about bed. "Who is it?" I called out, a bit reluctant to open up at that hour.

"Grace Storm — please let me in!"

I opened the door and she virtually fell on me, her shirt torn and her cheek bruised as if by a blow. "What in hell happened to you?" I asked.

"I — They've got Danny, my husband!"

"Who? The police?" It was the first crazy thought to enter my head.

"Not the police, no." She was trying to catch her breath. "Some guys he was dealing with. Drugs — you know?"

"Grass?"

"Other stuff too. God, I told him to be careful!"

"Do you want me to phone the police?"

"No! They'll only get him killed!"

"These people threatened to kill Danny?"

She was gasping for breath between sobs. She managed a nod and said, "They'll kill him unless I get something for them."

"What?"

"They're holding him for ransom. They want a pound of cocaine by tomorrow night or they'll kill him!"

"My God! A pound of cocaine?"

Where could you get —?"

"I know where to get it, but it costs fifteen thousand dollars."

"Won't they just take the money?"

She shook her head. "They claim Danny welshed on a deal last year and kept a pound of cocaine that belonged to them. They want it back."

"I though drugs came in kilos," I said for no good reason.

"That's from overseas, like grass from Mexico. If it's repackaged here it's in pounds and ounces."

"You know a lot about it."

"I know I've got to get up fifteen grand by tomorrow or they'll kill him!"

"Let me call the police. It's the only way."

But she shook her head. "Call the police and we lose either way. Either they kill Danny or both of us get arrested."

"Where's he been getting the cocaine? Here on Cape Cod?"

"He drives in to Plymouth for it at night. Then he passes it on to someone in Hyannis; after it's been cut."

"So that's what you've been doing over there all summer." I touched the bruise on her face. "At least let me wash that off. They do it to you?"

She nodded. "Just a while ago. When they came to tell me they had Danny."

"Are you two really married?" I asked when I returned with a wet

cloth for her face.

"Of course! You think I'd be this upset if we weren't?"

"I just asked." While I washed her face she produced a safety pin from somewhere and repaired her ripped shirt. Finally I asked, "Why did you come to me?"

"You're the only one I know here."

"Do you have any family?"

"Sure—back in Ohio."

"Friends?"

"Our friends are the ones who kidnapped him!"

"What about this contact in Plymouth? Do you know him?"

She nodded. "But he won't talk to me unless I have money. It's strictly a cash business."

"I don't know what I can do to help, short of calling the police."

"Look — if you want to help, you can. You can. You can save Danny's life! Can you put your hands on fifteen thousand just for a day? Danny's got plenty of money stashed to pay you back, but I don't know where it is."

"Fifteen — I'm afraid that's out of the question." I had serious doubts, but something about her was getting to me. The way Margo had, at first . . .

"It was in the paper that you got a big advance for your next book — over a hundred thousand dollars."

"You know what happens to that money? I get half now and half when I deliver the acceptable manuscript. My agent gets ten

percent and I have to pay an estimated tax on the rest. If there's a paperback sale later on, my publisher takes half of that money and keeps the rest till my next royalty statement. And my agent gets ten percent of that too."

"You could still raise fifteen thousand for a day."

"No. I'm sorry." I hardly knew her, and I didn't know her husband at all. Still, I felt a bit guilty refusing her, and couldn't deny a rising desire.

She was silent for a moment. Then she asked, "Could you do one thing for me, at least? Could you come with me to Plymouth while I try to get the cocaine?"

"You said you couldn't get it without the money."

"I'll have to try. There's no other way. Maybe they'll trust me for a day." Even if *you* won't, her words seemed to say.

"I don't want to get involved with any cocaine dealers."

"You don't have to get involved! You won't even see them! I just want you waiting in the car while I go inside. They see someone's waiting for me, they won't try any funny stuff."

"And what if the cops stop us with a pound of cocaine in the car?"

"You don't know a thing about it. I was giving you a ride back to your cottage."

There was no reason why I should endanger myself by riding

to Plymouth with girl I hardly knew. No reason in the world, except that she was attractive and she reminded me a bit of Margo. After denying her the money she needed, wasn't a bit of my time the least I could give her?

"All right," I said, abruptly. "It's crazy, but I'll go along."

"You will?"

"Let's take my car, though. It looks a bit more respectable than yours. And if we're stopped by the police I'll say I was giving *you* a ride."

IT TOOK US just over an hour to reach Plymouth and a modest green ranch house on the south side of town. Most of the houses were dark since it was after midnight, but this one still had a light glowing in the kitchen. I parked a couple of houses past it and Grace got out. "I won't be long," she said. "I hope."

"How long should I give you?"

"A half-hour, but don't worry. Nothing will happen."

I sat there in the dark with my headlights off, listening to the occasional night sounds, telling myself I was a fool to be getting involved. Margo had always said I was a fool, doing crazy things that could ruin my career as a writer. I used to tell her that nothing could ruin a writer's career except being dull.

After ten minutes I began to grow restless. Something was wrong — I could feel it.

Maybe I wouldn't wait a half-hour. Maybe I'd take off —

"Here I am," she said, opening the door. I hadn't even seen her approaching in the darkness.

"Did you get it?"

She started to open a brown paper bag. I had a glimpse of an inner plastic bag full of white powder, but I didn't want to see any more. She closed it and said, "They're trusting me till tomorrow night. Then I have to deliver the money or give them back their coke."

I started the car and headed south toward the Cape. "This is one trip where I obey all the speeding laws. Are you going to Hyannis tonight?"

"Not till morning. I wouldn't trust that crowd after midnight. They'll be high on something and looking for kicks."

There was a police car parked by the canal bridge, but the cop didn't give us a second look. We were back to the cottage by one-thirty. Grace Storm got out of the car with her package. "Look, I'm not asking to sleep with you, but could I stay at your cottage tonight?" she asked.

After what I'd already done, it seemed a simple enough request. "All right," I agreed. "There's a second bedroom."

She hid the cocaine at the bottom of the kitchen wastebasket, and I showed her to the bedroom. Perhaps noticing some of the womanly touches in the cottage she

asked, "Do you have a wife? I guess I should have asked that before suggesting I stay here tonight."

"I had a wife," I said simply. "Not any more. This is my first summer here without her."

"I'm sorry."

I tried to smile. "So am I."

She closed the door of her room and went to bed. I tried to do the same, but the thought of the cocaine in my kitchen had an unnerving effect. What if we were raided by the police? What if I was being set up for some sort of shakedown racket?

I got out of bed and went quietly into the kitchen, determined to move the cocaine to a hiding place of my own choosing. Hefting it in my hand, I decided to bury it in the sand on the beach. That would be safest for everyone, especially me. But the moon had broken through the clouds outside and the beach was nearly as bright as daytime. Anyone watching from one of the other cottages would surely see me.

Watching? Who would be watching?

I glanced out the window at Grace Storm's cottage.

I had only her word, after all, that her husband had been kidnapped. Suppose he was still over there, watching, waiting in the dark?

But for what?

Something made me open the tape on the bag of cocaine and



place a few crystals on my tongue. I didn't really know what it was supposed to taste like, but it tasted exactly like sugar to me.

IN THE MORNING Grace was up early. When I came out I found her drinking a cup of coffee in the kitchen. "Hope you don't mind my helping myself, but I want to get over to Hyannis by nine. I'll be a wreck until I know Danny is safe."

I glanced at the wastebasket where I'd replaced the package and saw that she'd already removed it. "Sure you'll be all right on your own?"

"I will, by daylight."

I watched her drive away with the package and then sat down to wait. I didn't know what I was waiting for, but I knew I hadn't seen the last of Grace Storm that day.

It was about two hours later when I saw her returning. I went to the door to meet her. "Where's Danny?" I asked.

She came into my living room looking pale and drawn. "They've still got him. They took the cocaine and said they want more — cash this time."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand. My God, where am I going to get it?"

I'd had just about enough by that time. "I can't imagine, but you're not getting it from me."

"What?"

I grabbed her by the shoulders. "I sampled your cocaine during

the night. It was sugar."

"I don't know what you're talking —"

"Sugar! You and your husband are playing me for a sucker, aren't you? This whole thing is some sort of shakedown racket."

"You're insane!"

"Come on! We're going over to your cottage right now — and I wouldn't be surprised if we find Danny-boy hiding under the bed."

"All right," she said quietly. "If that's the only way to convince you."

I started out the door with her and then hesitated. She was too willing. In fact, she was almost eager that I accompany her across the lot to her cottage. If I was right — if her husband hadn't been kidnapped — then he was hiding in that house, waiting for me.

"Just a second," I said.

I went into my den and opened the big bottom drawer of my desk. The padded book mailer was still there from the first day, unopened. Now I ripped the tape and pulled out a small revolver. I slipped it into my pocket and went back outside.

She led the way to her cottage in silence, unlocking the door and allowing me to enter first. My right hand was in my pocket, curled around the butt of the gun.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"Look for yourself if you're so smart."

I went to the bedroom first and opened the closet. Her clothes

were there but none of his. I checked the kitchen and the other rooms. All were empty. There was no trace of Danny Storm or any of his possessions. Finally I remembered her favorite hiding place and looked in the bottom of the wastebasket. There, rolled into a ball, were his jeans and baggy blue shirt.

"Where is he?" I demanded, sensing now that I was getting in deeper than I wanted. "What have you done with your husband?"

"I told you what happened."

"You told me a pack of lies! Danny wasn't kidnapped, and that cocaine was really sugar. You didn't plan to ransom him, did you? He was going to be found dead, probably washed up on shore, and I was going to corroborate your story. Isn't that it?" I'd taken the gun from my pocket now, to show her I meant business.

But there was only a look of triumph on her face. "No, that's not it, Mister Smart Author! That's not it at all!"

"Then where is Danny Storm?"

Her face had turned cold and hard, as if she'd never seen the gun in my hand. "Don't you understand yet? There is no Danny Storm! There never was a Danny Storm — he doesn't exist!"

AND THEN I DID understand, a bit too late. "You were Danny, wearing those jeans and the shirt! That's why I never saw you to-

gether, why he never spoke! You're tall enough, and the right boyish shape. With a wig and a false beard you could fool anyone from a distance."

"I only had to fool you," she said. She turned and pulled down the shade on the front window, cutting out a bit of the morning sunlight.

"Then there were no dealers in Plymouth! You took me along for the ride, stopped at a likely-looking house with a light, and hid in the backyard for fifteen minutes. You had the sugar inside your shirt all the time!"

"You're doing better. You really are!"

"It was all for my benefit, the entire plot. But why? What were you after — my money? Did you think I'd be dumb enough to turn over ten or fifteen thousand to a virtual stranger?"

"No. I didn't want the money."

"What, then?"

"I wanted you," she said quietly. "I'm Margo's sister."

"What?"

"The kid sister you never met — remember?"

It was all a fantasy of changing shapes, slipping through my fingers before I could grasp them. "Margo's sister — Yes, you reminded me of her."

"You murdered Margo, didn't you, on that street in the Hollywood Hills? There was no mugger with a gun that shot her while you two were out walking. You were

jealous because she was leaving you, and you killed her. I had a letter from her, written the day she died, but the police told me that wasn't evidence enough. They needed the gun. They'd searched the sewers and everywhere in the area you might have thrown it. But I remembered a British mystery once where the killer mailed the gun to himself after a murder. There was a mailbox a few feet from where she was killed. You had a self-addressed package with you, and slipped the gun into it after you shot her. You mailed it to yourself back here, and it's been waiting at the post office all these weeks for you to pick it up."

"This cottage —"

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(continued from page 4)

readers are too passive to write. But that doesn't make too much sense, because many mystery buffs are also science fiction fans. Surely there are mystery readers out there who would like to write in and critique every issue, just like in the days of the pulps. (Now those were letter columns!) It would be a help to the authors, too, to get some feedback. I know you like my stuff, and my friends and relatives like most of it, even though they think I'm a little crazy sometimes (most of the time!), but it would be fascinating to me to find out what those 50,000 or so readers think of it."

"I paid a chunk of money to sublet it from the original renters. I gambled the gun was here, and I had to put you in some sort of jeopardy so you'd produce it. I hoped you'd bring it along to Plymouth last night, but when you didn't I had another try today."

"You're too smart," I said. "But I still have the gun."

She wasn't afraid. "Use it if you want. When I pulled down that shade it was a signal to the local police to move in. They'll be here in just a minute, and there's not a mailbox in sight."

She was a damned smart girl. I looked at her and wished I'd never left my typewriter. Then I put the gun on the table and sat down to wait.

To me, too, Jim. I know from experience that format has a lot to do with it, and *pulps* is the key word. When I became editor of a digest-sized science-fiction magazine in 1955, I did my damndest to make the letter column (named "Feedback," incidentally) fat and sassy — but nothing worked. There wasn't much room for letters, and few letters came. Still, I'm always ready to try again. Is *Mike Shayne* going to reflect what the readers want, or are you all going to sit back and read what *I* want you to? Now is the time to decide whether you want to speak up, or just sit there being passive.

—LTS

# The Wrong Number



by Julie Smith

When seeking an eye for an eye, make sure you can see everything clearly.

**AFTER CLARA'S DEATH,** Mike Demerritt began collecting information on the president of the telephone company. When he knew nearly everything there was to know about Howard Sherman, he found there were only three items he was interested in — Sherman's address, the time of Sherman's favorite television program and the fact that Sherman was divorced and lived alone. This last fact was important because Demerritt intended to bomb Sherman and he didn't want to

kill his wife.

Demerritt had never made a bomb in his life, but he figured it would be much like taking one apart, only in reverse. After five years on the police department bomb squad, Demerritt had done that many times. He knew as much about bombs as anybody in the country.

He started making simple bombs, just to see if he could do it, and setting them off in open fields. He was even called on to investigate the craters they caused

and the fragments they left and to report on the kind of bombs they were. This he did conscientiously.

When he felt he was ready, he built the bomb he intended to use to kill Howard Sherman.

Demerritt was going to kill Howard Sherman because the telephone company had killed Clara, his wife of six years.

The bomb was actually set by a group of terrorists who were after Demerritt himself, and they had since been arrested. But Demerritt blamed the telephone company as much as he blamed them. He thought of his plan as an eye for an eye — a president for a wife.

Clara had died nearly six months ago, at a time when there had been a rash of terrorist bombings.

Demerritt had a good source in the underground, someone he knew only as Eddie, who would report on where the bombs were and when they were set to go off. Since the terrorists were amateurs, the bombs sometimes went off accidentally before Demerritt could get to them, but he took enough of them apart to get a reputation. There were television and newspaper interviews, even a commendation from the chief. So the terrorists decided to bomb him.

He got the tip from Eddie, when he met him on their usual corner. "You're next on the list, man,"

Eddie had said. "They went on the 'mission' this morning."

For the first time since he'd joined the bomb squad, Demerritt was afraid. If they'd planted a bomb at his house, it was probably set to go off sometime that night, when he'd be home. But these ham-fisted creeps made lousy bombs and Clara would be at home now, having her afternoon nap.

Demerritt leaped for the corner telephone booth. The phone was out of order.

Demerritt looked up and down the block, feeling panic rise inside him like nausea. It was a residential area — nothing on the whole block except apartment houses.

He ran across the street and drove the two blocks to the next phone booth. He grabbed the receiver and deposited his dime — no dial tone. He gave it such a wrench of frustration it parted company with the rest of the machine.

He ran a stoplight and narrowly missed a taxi before he found what he was looking for — a drugstore with a phone booth.

As he dropped his dime in and dialed, it occurred to Demerritt he had never called his suburban home from a pay phone in the city. He prayed the call would go through.

His dime came back. "Please deposit twenty cents," said the operator. Demerritt turned his

pockets out. He had a nickel and a fifty cent piece.

"I don't have it, operator," he said. "This is an emergency."

"Would you like to reverse the charges?" asked the operator.

"Yes. Yes, please." He'd forgotten he could do that.

"Your name and the number you're calling from, please."

Demeritt told her, looking at his watch. It was 2:30 exactly.

The phone rang. Once, twice, three times. Clara answered on the fourth ring. "Clara, listen," he said. "Get out, quick. Leave the house."

His words were drowned by the operator's. "I have a collect call," she said, "for Mrs. Clara Demeritt from Mike. Will you accept..."

The bomb exploded before she finished the sentence. Clara was killed instantly.

DEMERRITT FOUND Eddie and had to break three of his ribs to learn where the terrorists were. After they were arrested, one of them confessed: he said the bomb was meant to go off at 2:30 a.m. instead of p.m.

But Demeritt was not nearly satisfied with the arrests. He hated his work, hated the city, hated almost everything except Clara, with her long black hair and her easy laugh. She had been the only part of his life that had ever seemed real; she pulled him out of his frequent depressions,

kept him going when he wanted to give up, soothed people when he was rude to them, made friends when he couldn't. He knew he was not a social man — antisocial, Clara had said more than once. He felt that whatever was good in him died with Clara.

He would have liked to kill the telephone company itself if he could have, for taking her away. He would have liked to shoot strangers on the street, out of frustration and hatred for the human race. But instead he focussed his attention on Howard Sherman.

The day after the funeral, Demeritt went to see him, and told him the story of Clara's death. Howard Sherman said he was sorry, that the telephone company did the best it could, but that labor costs were very high and repairs weren't always made as quickly as the telephone company would like because it had to lay off so many people. Howard Sherman said "personnel" instead of people.

Demeritt asked Sherman why his call hadn't been put through immediately when he told the operator it was an emergency. Howard Sherman snickered. One of those superior snickers people sometimes use when someone said something so stupid they are surprised out of their manners.

"But Mr. Demeritt," he said, "she had only your word it was an emergency. What if the tele-

phone company put through every call from people who claim they have an emergency and no change? Have you any idea how much that would cost?" Howard Sherman gave him an estimate in seven figures. He also complained that people were always dialling wrong numbers and the telephone company had to absorb the cost of the long-distance ones.

Demerritt formed the opinion that Howard Sherman himself was a wrong number that walked like a man.

He decided that not only would he kill Sherman, he would get the telephone company to help him do it.

He sold everything that had belonged to him and Clara and moved into a furnished apartment to wait until the one he really wanted was vacant — the apartment next door to Howard Sherman's.

Sherman's apartment manager said the current tenant's lease had a year to run, but Demerritt was willing to wait. When the year was up, Demerritt signed the lease, but he didn't move in right away.

He took his time furnishing the apartment. He bought a deep handsome sofa and a pair of antique chairs to draw up to the fireplace. He had the floors refinished and chose Oriental rugs to set them off. He had bookshelves custom-made and filled with the books he bought. He told

people he didn't intend to move in until it was perfect.

One day, when he was meeting a delivery man there, Howard Sherman came home and saw him letting the man in. "So you're the new neighbor," he said. "How about coming over for a drink? My name's Howard Sherman."

In the months since his wife's death, Demerritt had built up a hatred for Howard Sherman that even he would not have called normal. He was willing to attribute any evil to the man. Yet he was shocked that Howard Sherman failed to remember him.

But he was delighted to have a drink with Sherman. He wanted to see which chair Howard Sherman sat in and where the television was. He was pleased to see that his target sat in the only chair that looked as if anyone ever used it — a worn leather one with an ottoman — and that the TV was strategically placed for good viewing from it. This meant that Sherman would certainly sit there to watch his favorite television program, *Gridiron*, a sit-com about a professional football player.

Demerritt kept finding new things his apartment needed, putting off moving in. He had been asked to speak on explosives at a law enforcement conference on the West Coast and he wanted to move the week of the conference. It was scheduled to begin on a Tuesday, the day *Gridiron*



was shown. Demerritt planned to leave Monday night.

He called the telephone company on Friday, to ask that a phone be installed in his new apartment on the following Monday — a phone with an unlisted number. Then he made plans to take the day off to move in.

Early Monday morning, Demerritt packed his car with the two suitcases and half a dozen boxes that held all the possessions he had at his furnished apartment. He drove to his new apartment and unpacked, waiting for the telephone man. His plane was scheduled to take off at 7:00 p.m., which meant he had to leave by 5:30, allowing an hour to get to the airport and half an hour to check in. The telephone company sent a man to install his telephone at 3:00 o'clock.

By 5:00 p.m., Demerritt was packed for three days away from home. Although everything he owned would be destroyed except what he took with him, he resisted the temptation to take anything he didn't really need except the framed picture of Clara that stood on his bureau. It wasn't difficult; he had only furnished the place because it would have been suspicious to have a phone installed in an empty apartment. He had reckoned that the more lavishly he furnished it, the more convincing would be the deception.

He put his suitcase by the door

and finished assembling the bomb. He attached it to the wall that formed an interface with Howard Sherman's apartment, choosing the section Sherman's chair leaned against.

There was no timer, no detonator. The bomb would be activated by sound — the sound of a ringing telephone. Demerritt had designed it and tested it in an open field, much as he had tested the simpler bombs. He used a tape recording of a telephone for the test, and then had destroyed the tape.

Taking advantage of direct dialing, Demerritt would call at 8:10 the following evening, when Howard Sherman would be enjoying *Gridiron*. The explosion would destroy most of Demerritt's apartment and would kill Howard Sherman instantly. It might cause windows to break elsewhere in the building, but no one except Sherman would be hurt.

Because Demerritt would jimmy his own lock as soon as he stepped into the corridor, it would look as if someone had broken in to plant the bomb. It would be thought the intended target was Demerritt himself.

Demerritt turned out the light, picked up the suitcase and opened the door. "And that's it," he said to himself, "for Mr. Wrong Number Sherman."

As he reached for the door, the telephone rang.

# Black As The Night

By Joe R. Lansdale  
and  
Lewis Shiner



"It's that jerk Foster, I thought. He couldn't leave it to the professionals, and now he's gone and killed somebody." Another shot whined off the brick next to me. . .

THE OVERWEIGHT GUARD nodded at my pass and said, "Keep to the right." He had to shout so I could hear him over the pumping and whining of the machines. "You'll see Patsy Levere, that's his secretary."

He handed me a hard hat and pointed to a sign saying it was the sort of area where you had to wear one. I nodded, smiled and put it under my arm. He started to say something, then shrugged and turned away.

The inside of the refinery was hotter than the molten core of hell, hotter than the drizzling Houston summer afternoon outside. The stink of the crude oil,

the hiss of live steam, the weight of the tired air, all seemed to be shoving against me like something alive. I kept to the right of the huge three-story room until I got to a small, self-contained office, walled in glass.

I was looking into a waiting room, and I could see a dark head behind a desk, with hair too long and swept too high to be quite fashionable. Her face was a bit pinched, but pleasant, and had probably looked a lot better in high school — say, ten years ago. She stood up when I pushed open the office door, showing me a mannish suit that was losing the battle to a woman's body. She had the sort

of breasts that had weight as well as shape, and hips that seemed to be trying to wrestle their way out of the skirt. "You must be Mr. Talbot." There was a smile that went with the East Texas voice, and I tried to give it back to her.

"That's right."

"If you'll just sit down, Mr Foster will be with you in a moment."

I tossed the hard hat on one chair and folded myself into the other one. The sudden rush of air conditioning had hit me hard and my bad knee was starting to give me trouble. I hooked the cane over the chair arm and tried to massage the leg without calling any attention to it.

I hadn't been there a minute when the door to Foster's office swung open and a big, blowzy woman with platinum hair swept out into the waiting room. The layers of her dress looked like silk, and from the hard edge to her laughter I put her in her late fifties. She had enough makeup on to keep it strictly a guess.

"I'm off to Dallas, then," she sang happily, and didn't notice me on her way out the door. I looked back to Foster's office and saw a guy leaning in the doorway, taking up in width what he gave away in height. His lavender shirt-sleeves were rolled up and a fat blue tie hung around his neck like somebody had missed pinning a tail on the donkey. A cigar about half the size of my cane was hang-

ing out of his bulldog mouth, and he stopped to light it before looking at me. His black eyebrows got a workout as he puffed fire into the thing, and even his balding head wrinkled with the effort.

"The wife," he said to the glass office front, and then he said, "You must be Talbot," to me.

I told him I was, and got up, and he shirted a few bones around in my hand. "C'mon in," he said around the cigar, and led the way into his office.

It was cool and dark in there, and the one wall that wasn't paneled was glass, floor to ceiling, looking out on the main floor. You could see most of the operation from there, and I had a sudden vision of Foster as a balding spider, poised and waiting for somebody to screw up. He settled behind the desk and I took the other chair, sitting out toward the edge. I reached up behind my coat and peeled the shirt loose from my back.

"What happened to your leg?" he asked, pointing with his chin.

"Accident," I said. "A few years back, when I was a cop. They had to give me a plastic kneecap."

He seemed satisfied and I didn't offer any details, didn't mention the riders in the white hoods, or the bomb that was supposed to take off more than my kneecap. Or having to make the choice between a private license and a desk job with the force.

"So," I said, "what can I do for you, Mr. Foster?"

He started to batter the ashtray with his log of a cigar and I knew I'd spooked him. "It's a little hard for me to talk about . . ." he began, and I held up a hand.

"I understand," I said. "I get my work because people don't feel like they can go to the cops with their trouble. Personal stuff, a lot of the time, things they don't like to talk about. But like it says on the card, *Confidential*. That's for real. If it wasn't, word would get around and I'd be out of business. You can trust me." I showed him the bridgework.

"I know," he growled, and he fished his smouldering cigar from the ashtray and worked it around in his massive, thin-lipped jaws. "I guess you're used to this sort of thing, but it's the first time for me."

I tried my winning smile again, threw in a touch of a confidential voice. "Is it blackmail?"

Foster almost came out of his chair. "How'd you know? Did somebody . . ."

"Relax, Mr. Foster. It's like you said, I'm used to this sort of thing. It was an educated guess. But it's not that uncommon. Think of it this way. You're just subcontracting to get rid of a problem."

He liked that. He was nodding it over when something behind my shoulder caught his attention. "Yeah?" he said.

I swiveled around to see a young black man halfway in the door. He had a stained blue work shirt and close-cut hair, and it looked like he had some kind of insignia on his shirt, like stubby Air Force wings. His eyes were hard and smart, but he held himself like he'd rather be doing anything else in the world than standing in that doorway. Foster didn't seem too crazy about the idea, either.

"We just turned three thousand hours on that number one pump," the young man said. "Want us to do the P.M. on it?"

"Is that what the book says?" Foster glared at him.

"Yeah."

"Then do it, Johnson! You want a court order?"

"It's just that we have to pull it off-line. You're the one that said to tell you —"

"So now you've told me! Just do it! Go work the damned thing over and get out of here!"

On his way out, Johnson banged the door hard enough to shake the glass in the next wall.

Foster shook his head. "Jungle bunnies. Have to be told when to take a leak. If I had my way . . ." He let it trail off. I looked out the windows at the stink and the grease and the noise on the other side, and the air conditioning felt cold as an Arab's dream.

"How do you want to handle this?" I asked abruptly.

"Hmmm? What do you mean?"

He'd lost my train of thought.

"Do you want me to make a payoff, or do you want me to . . . lean on him a bit?"

"No. Nothing like that." He sized me up again and said, "I guess you're used to that too, bum leg and all, but no." He shook his head so the bald spot picked up the light. "Just carry some money for me and bring back some pictures. Do I . . . do you have to know where they are?" I followed his eyes to a wall safe, and figured he'd kept the samples they sent him there. That was okay. Some people burn 'em, but it's smarter to keep them for evidence, just in case.

I shook my head. "It's all the same to me. I pick up the pictures and hand over the money. I bring the pictures to you and you hand over two hundred dollars."

Foster burned me with his eyes. "For a lousy package you want two hundred dollars? It might as well be you holding me up."

"For going out with some creeps that might put me in the bayou, two hundred dollars is damned cheap." I reached for my cane. "Take it or leave it." At the moment I didn't care. I didn't give a damn for Foster or the way he ran his outfit, and I didn't need the money that bad. I'd gone without meals before.

"All right," Foster said at last, and took a vicious bite out of his cigar. He fingered the end out of

his mouth and plopped it in the ashtray. Then he gave his windows a furtive glance and took a brown paper package out of a drawer. He held it by one end for a second, then his face clouded up and he tossed it on the desk like he was spitting on the floor.

"There it is."

From the size, and the noise it made when it slapped the table, it was a good-sized stack of bills. I could still get it in my coat pocket, though.

Foster hit the intercom and said, "Patsy, get me a hundred out of petty cash, will you? I'll get you the voucher after awhile."

"Yes, Mr. Foster. Right away."

The voice was a lot softer and lower than the one she'd had for me outside.

To pass the time, I said, "Pretty tough security around here."

He liked that. He leaned back in the chair and worked the cigar around some, and said, "Tougher than it looks. Nothing comes in or out of here except it goes past Henry at the front door. Nothing and nobody."

He caught me looking at a fire door with a bar handle that broke up the wall opposite the windows. "Except me," he added with a grin. "And I can't even get back in that way. No handle outside."

About that time Patsy came in with the money, and the small talk fell apart. She took the ten steps from the door to the desk like she was taking the runway in Atlantic

City, and there was so much going on under all that gray tweed that I didn't know what to look at next. She counted out five twenties, looking at Foster, and I might as well have been sitting in the outer office. When she was through she wiggled away from one of Foster's hands and closed the door behind her.

Foster winked at me. "Not bad, huh?"

"Not at all."

He leered at me and whispered, "Marie — that's the wife — hates her. Every time she comes down here she's got a smart crack about Patsy. Easy enough to figure. You want to know what she said today?"

"Maybe you better tell me where the drop is."

I kept pulling him away from the nice, easy things and dumping him back with his troubles. He leaned forward again and dumped the cigar back into the ashtray. "Down by the ship channel. There's a Greek restaurant called the Archimedes." He gave me the address. "I'm supposed to meet him in the alley behind it at eight tonight."

I nodded. "You want me to check back with you tomorrow?"

"Make it tonight. I'll give you the other hundred then. The wife'll still be in Dallas, and the boy is working through till eleven." He made an offhand gesture at a boy on the far side of the glass, far enough away to seem

dwarfed by the storage tanks and huge runs of pipe. I guessed his age at sixteen, and couldn't help thinking that the grease and humidity couldn't be doing much for what was left of his complexion. The rest of him was built for endurance, like his old man, and I got the feeling the work didn't bother him much.

"Takes after his father," Foster said, then smoothed it with a laugh. "He may not look like much, but Wayne's tough as nails and he's not afraid. This'll be his, once he's earned it."

I nodded, and brought him back to reality for the last time. "If you could just give me the home address."

He wrote it down and we shook hands, and I left him looking out the wall of windows that stood between him and the ugliness that paid his bills.

## II

IF THERE'D BEEN a moon, the fog and drizzle would have hidden it. I parked the Plymouth in the lot next to the Archimedes and got out. Close by, in the channel, a tug honked, and farther out I could hear the dismal horn of a bigger ship. I patted the bulge the money made in my raincoat, and tried to turn the collar so it would keep me dry without getting between my hand and the Colt Python that was holstered under my arm.

I'd been cruising the neighborhood since 7:30, getting a feel for the area and trying to spot the bag man. I always tried to make the drop site early, just in case the other side ran to being nervous. My own nerves were starting to wear as the *tamboura* inside the restaurant wound up the scale and the cymbals started clashing toward a big finale. It was five minutes, to, and I crossed the parking lot toward the alley.

I was still a hundred yards away when the first shot cracked the night open. There was no ricochet, and I even thought I heard a small, strangled sound before the second shot came blasting over it. I doubted anyone in the restaurant had heard it over the noise, and this being the place it was, I doubted if a horde of noble citizens would have come running out of there to check out a gunshot anyway. I made for the back alley, working the cane hard, and flattening myself against the back wall just outside. As I dug the Python out from under my arm, I chanced a quick look around the corner. All I could see were two dim shapes at the end of the alley, one of them moving furtively.

"Halt!" I said in my best cop voice, and all I got for my trouble was a face full of brick chips from where the bullet hit the wall.

It's that jerk Foster, I thought. I couldn't leave it to the professionals, and now he's gone and

killed somebody. Another shot whined off the brick next to me, probably to keep me back while he finished up.

Foster!" I yelled. "Cut it out! It's Talbot, for God's sake." That did something, anyway, because the shooting stopped and I heard the slap of rubber soles running away from me. I went into the alley with the Python in the lead, but nothing moved and the footsteps were echoing off to my right. I ran to the mouth of the intersecting alley and followed it all the way out to the street, but whoever had done the shooting was lost in the fog and the darkness.

I went back the way I'd come and nearly fell over the body. The only light came from one dim bulb on a creosote pole, and it was barely enough to tell it was a corpse and not a sack of garbage. Inside the *Archimedes*, the music died with a clatter of tambourines.

He wore a cheap plastic raincoat, and under it I could see a patterned silk shirt and tight blue pants. His skin was a deep, even black, his features regular, and his hair expensively cut. I counted three holes in his shirt. Two were from bullets, one in the gut and the other close to the heart. Damned good shooting for nighttime in the rain. The third hole came from a missing patch of material, and when I bent down to look at it, I saw light glinting off a piece of metal near-



by. It turned out to be a lapel pin, with the torn piece of short still fastened to it, as if the killer had ripped it off and thrown it away in anger. It looked like the same pin that the man Johnson had been wearing at Foster's plant. I could see now that each wing had a letter cut into it. W.R., it spelled, whatever that meant. I wiped the metal with my handkerchief and put it back where I'd found it.

I went through the rest of his clothes, and it turned out the way I expected. No pictures, no I.D. The music started up inside the Archimedes again, making me jump to my feet too fast. The plastic in my knee sent a bolt of current straight up my spine and I had to clench my hands until it went away. *Save it*, I told myself. *You're going to need it*. I limped out of the alley and headed for my car.

I didn't like walking off and leaving a body, but I had something to take care of. I was going to find Foster, and he was going to convince me he didn't kill the man in the alley. Otherwise I was calling the cops. There was no third way.

I turned things over in my mind as I drove back toward Houston. The more I thought about it the less I liked it and the more I started to feel like I'd been set up. So I finally pulled off to the side of the road, and while the wipers beat time for me I tore open

the brown paper package Foster had given me.

It had money inside, all right. It looked, felt, and smelled real. It was in hundred dollar bills, and a rough count made out two hundred of them. Twenty thousand was too much money to leave lying around as a prop in a setup job.

I got back on the road and turned the radio up, loud, so I wouldn't have to think.

When I pulled up at Foster's house there was only a single light inside, one gauzily lit window out of fifteen or so that faced the street. I parked the Plymouth and went up the walk, the warm drizzle making me sweat and making my knee throb. I leaned on the doorbell, more angry than I was confused or afraid, but when nobody answered, the fear came back.

I tried the doorbell again, and knocked, and banged with both fists. And when that didn't do it I went back to the car and got my tool kit and beat the lock and went in. When I closed the door behind myself I realized my teeth were clenched so tight my jaw was beginning to ache. I made myself loosen up, and fumbled for a light switch in the hall. "Foster?" I called. My voice wandered through the house like a restless cat. I couldn't find a switch so I wandered on into the blackness, following the bar of light from a half-opened door.

I got to the door and opened it.



It was a study of some sort. There were books along one wall, guns along another. There was a big desk next to the window. There were a couple of chairs and a floor lamp. There was a body in the middle of the beige carpet, slowly turning it red.

It had been Ralph Foster, once. Before a big caliber gun had taken the top of the head off and smeared it across one wall. It was my second corpse in under an hour, and I was losing my stomach for it.

But I knelt down anyway, and the knee cracked, and I didn't pay attention to it. I went over Foster's body, lightly, and there were no pictures, no scraps of paper, no clues, just his wallet and his car keys, and I left them where they were.

Then I went from room to room of the darkened house, checking to see if anyone wanted to take a shot at me. I turned on lights as I went, holding the gun high in front of me, but the place was as deserted as my brain. I wound up back in the living room and sat down by the phone. The police dispatcher put me on to a lieutenant named Stephano that I knew, and I told him about Foster. I had just hung up when I saw the glow in the fireplace and what looked like the corner of a photograph.

I lunged for it. Pulling it out of the coals, I slapped at it until the edges stopped glowing, then got

it into the light. There wasn't much left, but I tapped the ashes off and got a good look at what there was. Just two faces, one Foster's, and the other that of a beautiful woman. One was white, the other black. The woman had her mouth open, but it didn't look like she was telling him to stop. When I turned the picture sideways, with Foster on top and the black woman underneath, it got pretty clear what the money had been for.

I poked through the ashes, but the fire hadn't left anything else. I sucked on my lip and thought about it for a minute, then put the fragment of the picture in my billfold. Hell, if it hadn't been for me, it would have burned up and the cops wouldn't have had it anyway.

Going through the house again, more slowly this time, I tried to put things together. Who would kill Foster, then burn the pictures? Or had Foster been burning them himself when the killer came in? Did the same prson kill both Foster and the guy in the alley? If so, why? My brain was about as nimble as a tossed salad. I gave up deduction for the time being and tried some old-fashioned observation.

Ma and Pa Foster's bedroom had the usual king-sized bed and color TV, and not much else. There was a dressing table outside the king-sized bathroom and right next to the king-sized

closet. On it sat a gold-framed photo of Wayne, Marie and Ralph, all three of them decked out in blue nylon jackets. They all had patches over the left breast pockets that looked like they came from the National Rifle Association, and all three of them had rifles cradled in their arms. The family that shoots together stays together, I supposed.

Wayne only had a double bed and a black-and-white TV in his room, but he had a whole wall of trophies. Bowling, football, go-carts, shooting, track, tennis — a regular Jack Armstrong. No stamp albums, no records, no books other than a few current textbooks.

Next door was a game room with a pool table, a football setup, and three or four electronic games. A regular arcade. The den had a wet bar, well stocked, but only two bottles looked like they saw any use. If they ran true to stereotype, the bourbon had probably been Ralph's and the Gordon's gin belonged to Marie.

I heard a car in the drive, so I went back to the front room and stood by the fireplace. Two young cops burst in the door, and I managed to let the lead kid take the Python away without him shooting me, which was no mean trick. I even let the other one put bracelets on me since I expected Stephano to show up before long.

He made it in less than five minutes, with the Medical Ex-

aminer in tow. When he saw the steel on my hands he gave me what might have been a smile if he liked me better. "So it only took two of my boys to handcuff the poor old one-legged gumshoe," he said. "I hope you didn't give 'em worse than bruises."

I looked over at the kids and said, "Don't pay too much attention to Stephano. Him and me was cripples together." Stephano had a dead blue eye that wandered around from time to time, and he didn't like my talking about it any better than I liked looking at it.

"Okay, cut him loose," Stephano said. While one of the kids worked on my hands, I pointed to the den with my head.

"There's the meat."

Stephano rubbed the small of his back with a large right hand. "Foster?"

I had nothing to gain by playing dumb: "That's right. Big in oil refining, NRA, and two or three bowling leagues."

"Not to mention," Stephano said, the dead blue eye boring into me, "the KKK."

"Now wait a minute," I growled, "don't start trying to tie me into this!"

"I was in the squad room the night the Klan blew your knee off, Talbot. I talked to the guys that took you into surgery, and I've heard plenty about the promises you were making at the time."

He let it sink in, then he said,

"I'm not accusing anybody, but I want you to know where you stand."

So we went through it, by the book, and I didn't lie about anything, but I kept it vague when I got to the part about the man in the alley. I told him there had been shots, and I'd taken off, so he couldn't haul me down there for covering up a murder. It was true enough, as far as it went. Then I handed over the brown package of money and he called a prowl cop over to check the count. Then he paced back and forth in front of me while I sat on the brick hearth, and he dealt out the questions like losing cards. I was worried and I told most of it, that Foster had been my client, that it was blackmail, that I suspected he'd been running around on his wife.

"And you don't know anything about a dead man in that alley?"

I shook my head. "Who was it? Somebody close to Foster?"

Stephano curled his lip. "Not likely. He was some kind of union organizer, name was James Hill. But I'm pretty damned sure his killing is tied to this one, and that you know something about it you're not saying."

"Have I ever lied to you?"

"Don't get cute with me, Talbot," he snapped. "I haven't got the patience for it tonight. Just because I don't think you killed Foster doesn't mean the DA is going to believe me. I could even change my mind myself."

"Okay," I said, and stuck my hands out. "Take me down."

"Oh shut up, Talbot, for God's sake." I looked up right into his dead eye, but it didn't roll away this time. Instead it looked at me with cold anger. "You've got a reputation and you seem to think it's cute. But the next time some guy on the force leans on you or throws you in the can, the next time you get busted for just walking down the street, or you can't get your license renewed because the papers got lost, I want you to remember this. Tonight you had a chance to pay back some good things the cops in this town have done for you, and you didn't want it. So get out of here." He turned away from me and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Do I get my gun back?" I asked, standing up and stretching my arms.

"Give him his gun," Stephano said to one of the prowl cops.

I took it and put it away and started for the door. I had almost made it when Stephano said, "Talbot."

I turned to face him. "We're going to crack this case," he said. "And so help me God if it even looks like you had anything to do with this, you're going to get burned."

My hand was on the door and I opened it up. "Thanks, Stephano," I said. "Remind me to buy you an eyepatch for Christmas."

The mist was still coming down, but it was too hot and humid for the raincoat. I struggled with it for a minute and then I got mad and threw the cane at the sidewalk and tore the damned thing off. I limped after the cane and the leg died on me and I went onto the sidewalk. For a minute I lay there, wishing I *had* killed Foster, or anybody. Then I reached the cane and got back to my feet, my left hand still crushing the coat. I kept blinking until my eyes were clear again, then I got in my car and aimed it for the refinery.

### III

BY THE TIME I got to the parking lot the cops were just finishing with their end. I passed them as I pulled in, lost in the traffic of the shift change. I double parked by the plant entrance and waited, and after a couple of minutes Wayne Foster came out, followed by the young guy who had been in Foster's office that afternoon. Johnson tried to take Wayne's arm, and it looked to me like he was trying to say something decent to the kid. From the way he'd looked at the old man that afternoon I had an idea how hard that would be for him, but Foster's kid wasn't having any of it. He jerked his arm away without even looking and started across the parking lot. I got out of the car and followed him.

Two big cracking towers faced the main building, giant steel tubes where they heated the oil until it broke down and they could get more gasoline out of it. Lights ran all up and down the towers, and they made the parking lot bright enough that I could see the Foster kid pretty clearly before I caught up to him. His head was down, his shoulders were trembling, and it was a good bet there'd be tears in his eyes when he turned around.

*Gee, I thought, this is some swell job I've got. Taking time off from falling over bodies to hassle a kid who just lost his father.*

I caught up to him just as he got to his car. "Wayne?"

By the time he swung around he'd swiped at his face and straightened his back. "Yeah?"

I leaned against the side of the car next to his and looked him over, trying to figure how to play it. There wasn't going to be an easy way. "I know you don't want to talk to anybody right now. But it's important, and if it wasn't I wouldn't ask."

"You're that private cop my father hired." The word *father* seemed to hurt him.

"That's right. And I want to find out who killed him."

"Why?"

"I have my reasons. I guess you'd just have to trust me on that."

He worked it over for a minute, and I let him take his time. He

was not a bad-looking kid, once you got past the zits and the cocky set to the mouth that came with being sixteen. I could see pieces of his father in him, not just in the set of the jaw, but in the caution and toughness that came with knowing how to handle power. When he finally looked up, his eyes were guarded and I could barely hear his voice: "What do you want?"

"I want to know about tonight. If anything unusual happened. If anybody was gone for longer than they should have been, or if anybody did something that didn't seem to make sense."

"Which is just about what the cops wanted to know. And I'll tell you the same thing I told them. Nothing happened. It was the same old crap all night."

"Were you —"

"Yes," he cut me off. "I was there the whole time. I wasn't gone any longer than to take a leak."

"Easy," I said. "I'm not trying to back you into any corners. I just want to know anything else you might have told the cops. Anything at all might help."

"That was all I told them. Except the number where my mom is, in Dallas. You want that too?"

I just nodded and he rattled it off to me, fast, but I was good with numbers and I remembered it. Then he jerked open his car door and turned as if he wanted

to make a crack, but it didn't come out. Instead his eyes went down to the asphalt and he said, "I'm sorry . . ." Then he got in the car and slammed the door. The engine caught on the first try and he backed out and drove away.

I went back to my heap and cruised until I found a phone booth. There was a roll of quarters in the glove box for emergencies, not all of them financial. I worked a few of them out of the top and used them to call Dallas.

A woman's voice answered. "Hello?"

"Mrs. Foster?"

"This is her sister. Marie's gone back to Houston. Can I help you?"

"No, she had asked me to call her at this number this evening and I couldn't get an answer . . ." I said, making it up as I went along.

"We were out most of the evening," she said, her voice very distant and empty. "You could try to get hold of her in Houston tomorrow, or if you want to leave your name?"

"No thanks," I said, trying to sound clean cut. "I'll try her tomorrow. Thank you."

The line went dead and I put the receiver back. She could have been lying, of course, but it wasn't the easiest explanation. It seemed a waste to spend any more time chasing Marie when I still had two other live suspects.

I checked my watch and then the phone book. Patsy Levere was listed, and was likely to be less cooperative the closer it got to midnight. I wrote the address down and let the book swivel back into its slot. My stomach rumbled nastily, and I slapped at it and told it that it wouldn't be any happier with the meals at the County Jail. I had work to do.

Patsy lived in a nice white frame house in a nice white neighborhood, with too many nervous dogs barking at the night. I rang the doorbell twelve times before a light came on in the back part of the house. A minute later I heard the floor squeak on the other side of the door.

"Who's out there?" I could feel her eye looking at me through the peephole.

"Talbot," I said. "John Talbot. I was in to see Foster today."

"Yes . . . yes, I remember. Please go away."

"This is more important than your beauty sleep, Patsy. You'd better open up."

"Please go away or I'll call the police."

"Fine," I snapped. "You want the number? I'm sure they'd be glad to hear from you. It'll save them a phone call."

"What . . . what are you talking about?"

"You don't know?"

"No! If there's something wrong, I wish you'd just tell me."

"I'd rather come inside to do

it." She didn't answer that, so I said, "Okay. Foster's dead. Murdered. Now do you want to talk about it?"

I had to wait a long time for her voice to come back. "Is this some kind of joke?"

"Call the cops if you want. Ask them."

Finally, grudgingly, "Just a minute."

She opened the door wearing a blue quilted robe, the kind people's mothers wear, but on her it looked good. Her hair was loose and tousled, but it looked okay too. Most women don't go to bed looking that good, let alone wake up.

She walked away from me before I was even in the door and sat in a faded armchair with her legs crossed and her arms folded. "Dead?" she asked.

The room was full of plants and those tied-up pieces of string that are supposed to be an art form now. She had the place done up where you didn't notice the hair-line cracks in the wall or the blisters in the paint or the bare patches on the furniture, and it didn't seem to be much of a spot to be talking about death. I took a chair across from her.

"Shot," I said.

"Why? Who . . ." Her eyes were going red and there was getting to be a rasp to her voice.

"I don't know. Except that it had to do with blackmail."

She was crying now. It looked

real enough, but I was going to keep both eyes open anyway. "Oh God," she said. "I knew it. I knew it had to happen sooner or later."

"What?" I asked, trying to keep it easy. "What had to happen?"

She didn't even seem to notice me any more. "That poor boy. Oh God, that poor little boy."

Somehow I had lost the thread and nothing was making sense. "What? What boy? What are you talking about?"

"You mean it wasn't about the boy?"

"Lady, I don't have the foggiest notion of what you're talking about."

"You said blackmail . . ."

"Look, we're going to have to trust each other a little way if we're going to find Foster's killer. Now, what boy are you talking about?"

She put her head in her hands and kept it there. After a minute she said, "It was horrible. A couple of years ago, Ralph hit a little black boy with his car. It was an accident, but . . . we were down in the black part of town, it was late at night, we were together — he was afraid to stop. He's been afraid ever since that somebody knew about it, that it would catch up to him." She looked up for a second, then buried her face again. "I should never have told you about it."

"It can't hurt him where he is," I said. "Whoever killed him

is still walking around, and that's more important right now."

She was fighting to get control of herself. "What do you care? What difference does it make to you?"

I sighed, and stretched out my aching knee. "Foster was rich, and there's going to be a stink about this. The cops have to find somebody to hang for it. If they can't find the real killer, they'll hang me, never mind why, but they will. They let me know all that, then cut me loose so I'd do their dirty work for them."

"So I'm doing it. Maybe I don't like you for Foster's murder, but the cops could. Telling them about you and Foster could get them off my back for a while."

"You bastard."

"You have an alibi for tonight?"

"I came home at five, fixed dinner, watched TV, and went to bed early."

"Were you watching TV at eight?"

"Yes."

"What did you watch?"

She started describing a program to me, and I cut her off after a few seconds. It sounded convincing, but it wouldn't count for much in the end. She was looking blankly down at the floor now, and I could tell I didn't have long before she got defensive again.

"I saw the man who was supposed to collect the blackmail money," I said. "Tall, well-dressed black man. His name was



James Hill."

She shrugged. "I think he used to work at the plant a while back."

"There was a pin on his shirt. A small gold eagle with WR on it. Each letter was a wing."

"Worker's Rights. It's sort of a spinoff from the union. A lot of the Negroes are in it. A guy named Calvin Johnson is the head of it."

"Is that the Johnson who was in Foster's office today?"

She nodded. "Ralph hated him because he was so good at his job that he couldn't fire him. Johnson seemed to take every issue that came up as a personal thing. They . . . argued a lot. Worker's Rights meant Negro rights to Johnson, and was always wanting something or other."

"Any bad blood between Johnson and Hill?"

She shook her head. "I barely remember Hill. I couldn't tell you."

"Do you have Johnson's address?"

"If I give it to you will you go away? And leave me alone?"

I said that I would and she went to get it. She was back in a few seconds with a scrap of paper. "Good luck," she said as she handed it to me, with no conviction in her voice.

I looked at the paper. The street it named ran through the middle of the Fifth Ward, Houston's ghetto, and its murder capital. "Is this where Foster hit the kid?"

"Yes . . ." She shook her head violently to hold back the tears, and I knew she wanted me out of there. I got up and tried not to show how much the leg was hurting me as I caned myself to the door. She stopped me there.

"Mr. —"

"Talbot," I said.

"You never told me what he was being blackmailed for."

I shrugged. "It was nothing," I said. "Just some business deal."

I walked out and cursed myself for a sentimental idiot all the way to the car. She deserved to know why Foster had gotten leaned on, deserved the whole ugly truth of it. But I'd leave that to somebody else. I had looked at enough ugliness for a lifetime already that night, and I knew there was another lifetime's worth just ahead.

#### IV

THERE'S A SECTION of the Fifth Ward they call Pearl Harbor on account of all the blood that's been let down there. It's bad enough in the daytime, but after midnight I was about as safe as a raw steak in a shark tank.

I should have waited, but I couldn't. If the DA started leaning on Stephano, then Stephano would put me in the hoosegow and it was good-bye detective work. When that happened, any chance of finding Foster's real killer went



out the window.

For the money Johnson must have been making his place was dingier than I expected. It was one of a row of peeling shotgun houses, with sagging porches and broken picket fences. Somewhere a hungry cat was making a whine about three octaves above a train whistle. The rain had let up enough to leave the air thick, hot, and dead. I shivered in spite of it.

I knocked and didn't think too much about where I was or what I was doing. The house was dark, and I knocked again, beginning to hope he wasn't there, that I could just go home and not have to look down the throat of an angry gun.

There was still no light when the door came open suddenly, and I took a reflexive step back. Sure enough, there was an ugly-looking revolver, and Johnson's face just visible behind it.

"What you want, whey-face?"

"Kind of lost the polish out of your accent, Johnson."

He moved closer to me and the gun barrel dropped an inch. "Saw you at the plant today with Foster, didn't I?" He jerked his head. "That's enough for me. Pack it on out of here."

I put my hands up where I could use them, but palms out like you see in all the Westerns. "If you could get the gun out of my belly, I think we ought to talk."

He moved the barrel up to

where it was almost touching my chin. "How 'bout this, white-hide?"

I was a little sick of racism, on both sides of the fence. I slapped the gun away, hard enough to make his hand go numb, and by some miracle it didn't go off when it hit the porch. Then I gave Johnson a quick one, right between the ribs and the gut, so I could talk to him while he was getting his breath.

By the time his lungs were working again I had the Python out. "Don't get any ideas," I said, "about calling for help. I will shoot your ass. Get it?"

He nodded. It looked like I'd have to wait another minute before he could use his voice right. "I want to talk about tonight," I went on. "Like, were you or anybody else gone for long enough to blow Foster away?"

He shook his head. "No . . . no way, man . . . Cops already asked that . . . can't get past the guard, he'd know. Ask the cops. Nobody left." He was leaning back against the front of the house, and the fight looked to be out of him. "Can I sit down, man?"

"Sit," I said. "What did you say to Foster's kid on your way out of the plant tonight?"

"Nothing, man. I hated Foster, it's true, but the kid was shook. I just asked him if he needed a ride or something. His car won't start too good when it's been sitting.

Just trying to help out."

"I don't believe you."

"Hell, ask anybody! Everybody knows about the car —"

"Not the car. I don't think you cared for that kid any more than you did for Foster. I bet you did everything you could to make that kid's life miserable."

He shook his head. "Man, you're way into something you don't understand. I fought with Foster, sure, he was a bigot, sure, but that ain't no front page news. He had some nerve, man, putting his own kid down there with a mostly black crew. Yeah, we were a little hard on the kid sometimes, but at least he was out there working, not sitting in some air-conditioned office."

Something was bothering me, and I didn't know if it was in what he was saying, or in the way he said it. "You know somebody named James Hill?"

"Yeah, I know him," Johnson said. "He used to work at the plant. He was a troublemaker — like me, I guess — but he was late all the time, and sloppy, so Foster canned his ass. I . . . don't guess I hear much about him lately."

"You won't be hearing much. He was blackmailing Foster, and now he's dead. What do you know about that?"

I was wrong about the fight being out of him. He went for my knees, and I tripped over a loose board getting out of his way. He

came after me and I brought up the cane, hard, and caught him on the side of the neck. We were both on our knees, like a couple of kids playing at horses, and I suddenly lost my temper. Johnson was stunned and I knocked him over backward and knelt on his arms and slapped him. "I'm tired of playing games, Johnson. What do you know about the blackmail?"

"Get out of my face with that, man."

"I'm gonna be all over you like a cheap suit, Johnson. You hear me, man?" I slapped him again, and again, and on the last one I could hear his teeth rattle. "I'm tired, and I hurt, and I'm going to sit up here and slap you until you talk or until I stop feeling mean." I hit him again to let him know how I was still feeling.

"Ungh," he said, and I knew his mouth was too far out of shape to manage much. "Wife," he said, after a second. "And kids. In the house. Don't wake 'em."

"Then talk."

"All right. Okay. I knew about the blackmail."

"Who else did?"

"Everybody. Everybody on the floor. You know, all us niggers."

"Did you know what it was about?"

Johnson got quiet so I hit him again. "Did you?"

"Yeah. James had a kid, a little boy. Died in a accident a couple

years ago, before James came to work at the plant. He got a license number or something, somehow got the idea it was Foster that did it. So he got that job with him. Set him up with one of the sisters, you know, and did some pictures. We knew about it, and we didn't do nothin' to stop him. And you can sit there and slap me all night and I ain't gonna tell you I did wrong by that."

"No," I said, "I guess you aren't." I got up and gathered up my gun and my cane, and kicked Johnson's pistol far enough away that he couldn't get me in the back. Johnson got up, slow and sullen, but I just walked back to my car.

*Oh my God, I was thinking, when it gets this deep, how do you know what the truth is?* Foster, a little bigoted, hits a kid one night and does the wrong thing. Maybe from then on he can't stand blacks because they remind him of that mistake he made. Or maybe he was even worse than the bastard I took him for, maybe he ran the kid down out of pure meanness. But I would never know. The most I could hope for was to find out who killed him, just enough to pull my own neck out of the noose. And while Johnson had been talking the pieces had been falling together, making those soft clacking sounds like pool balls make when a sharp player is running the table. I thought I had it, and there was a chance, not much

of one, but a chance, that I could put it all away before morning, and I was going to take it.

## V

THIS TIME I PARKED by the fire door that led out of Foster's office, and I took a look at it by flashlight. I couldn't see any signs that it had been forced, at least not recently. That fit. I took out a long-bladed screwdriver, got inside, and sat down behind the desk to wait.

I thought about a lot of things, like how I was beginning to see too many sides to things any more. It was a sign of age, like the pains in the good knee, and the trouble I had getting out of bed to face an empty house in the morning. The fact that I couldn't see Foster as completely evil, that I couldn't blame Hill for what he'd done, that I even understood how and why Foster had been killed, were things that didn't do me any good as a detective. The padding on the leather chair was too soft for a man that had been up most of the night. I was dozing off, imagining myself as a District Judge, when the door from Patsy's office began to move.

My eyes snapped open and I could see the door slowly swinging in: A shadow moved along one wall and held a penlight on the safe. The shadow's hand worked the combination, and the safe unlocked with a click.

I got the Python out and said, "All right, Wayne, hold it right there."

I don't suppose I actually expected him to stop and give himself up. But I hadn't counted on the gun, either.

The first shot splintered the paneling behind my head. I dove for the desk and squeezed one off at the ceiling, just to let him know I was serious. He fired back once more, then I heard his footsteps pounding down the hallway.

I put the gun away and went after him, using the cane with both hands like a short-distance pole vaulter. He sprinted past the guard and I hobbled behind, yelling, "Call the cops!" at the booth, not believing it would do any good at all.

Wayne had half a minute on me when I slammed through the front door of the refinery, and I could barely see his shadow dashing across the parking lot. I couldn't risk a shot so I pushed on, keeping close enough to the parked cars that I could doge another bullet. But Wayne never turned around, and after a few seconds I realized where he was heading. He was going to go up the cracking tower.

That meant he was counting on my following him. If I'd had any brains I would have waited at the foot of the thing for him to come down or for the cops to get there. But I didn't know what was rattling around in his head, and I couldn't risk his taking potshots

at somebody, or, worse yet, taking a dive off the top. Besides, I didn't have patience to wait around. Instead I was going to follow him up a narrow ladder, with only one good leg, too little sleep, and nothing but a cold, hard little wad of rage to keep me going.

The tower went straight up for a couple hundred feet, shaped like one of those gantries they shoot rockets from. There were three safety platforms up the length of it, and in between strands of pipe fell like tangled, half-cooked spaghetti. The whole thing was lit up like a theater stage with hot white floodlamps.

I looked up from the first rung and the whole mass of pipe seemed to lurch over toward me. Wayne had just climbed onto the first platform and I could see a stiff breeze tugging at his greasy T-shirt. When I saw him sighting down the barrel of his gun, and I swung around to the far side of the ladder. The shot didn't come and I figured he'd thought better of using the gun around all the high-pressure lines. But just in case, I started climbing on the inside of the steps.

The rain started up again while I was hesitating under the first landing. I was about sixty feet off the ground and it made my stomach hurt to look down. I was feeling the wind myself now, and one rung of the ladder was cutting me just under the plastic knee. The metal was slick and cold

to the touch. I decided the hell with it, and stuck my head around the ladder, half expecting to get it blown away.

Wayne was nowhere in sight.

I swung back around to the outside and went up onto the platform. I unhooked the cane from my arm and leaned on it, getting my breath. The floor I was standing on was a flimsy-looking metal grating, about four feet wide, with a low railing all around. It felt about as secure as a cellophane bridge. I walked all the way around it anyway, with the gun out, listening for the kid.

The wind was knocking loose cables against metal, and the long, clanging noises hung for a while, then whipped away into the darkness. In between I could hear things roaring in the pipes, and, far away, a noise like footsteps climbing away from me.

The platform was deserted. I limped back to the ladder and glanced down to see a security guard flashing his hardware around. "Come down from there," he was shouting.

"There's a kid up here with a gun," I yelled back. "Get the cops, and for God's sake don't shoot." I didn't tell him who the kid was because it wouldn't have helped, even if he'd believed me.

Then I went up the ladder again.

I was pretty sure I'd seen a flash of white at the top of the tower, and it came again just as I got to the second platform. My hands

had turned to claws, clutching the rungs in silent panic, even though I was long past the point where I dared look down. I didn't stop this time, but kept climbing, and when I got close I swung back to the inside of the ladder and waited just under the platform.

The wind had turned rough, snapping at my clothes and shaking the ladder like a playful giant. The rain was gusting into my face now, hard enough to sting my cheeks. If it turned into a waiting game, I was sunk. I looked up through the grating, straining my eyes for a sign of the boy and blinking back the raindrops. It was light enough to tell he wasn't waiting at the head of the steps, but that was all. It would have to be enough.

When I stuck my head up over the platform, the Python was right beside it. I couldn't see Wayne, but gooseflesh was moving in ripples up and down the middle of my back.

I got up into a crouch at the top run of the ladder, the gun in one hand and the tip of the cane in the other, ready to use it as a weapon. And waited, fighting the wind and rain, fighting the urge to charge.

If I hadn't been looking in the right place at the right time, I would have been dead. But I saw Wayne's gun come around the side of the tower and got a shot off before he could. It was a good one, too, just cutting the hand badly enough that he wouldn't

be able to shoot with it. He jerked it back and I went after him.

I covered the distance in three steps. Wayne stood with his backside planted against the railing, the gun waving crazily in his left hand like a kite in the wind.

"Put it down, Wayne," I said to him. "You can't shoot that way." I tried to sound reasonable, but how reasonable can you be standing on a piece of glorified screen wire over a two-hundred-foot drop? "Let's go down and get out of the rain."

He wasn't going to be reasonable. I saw the tension in his trigger finger, but it was too late to move and I had nowhere to go.

The gun went off, and I heard the bullet go into the main wall of the tower. Then the night caught fire.

A jet of gasoline shot out of the bullet hole and exploded as soon as it mixed with the air. The hand of flame reached for Wayne Foster and took him high on the face, faster than either of us could see it happen.

He staggered once and started to go over the edge.

I dove for him but my arms were too short and his balance was gone. It seemed to take forever for him to go backward over the rail, hands clenched to his ruined face, and somewhere in there I reached out with the hook of my cane and got it snagged in his belt.

I thought it was going to take

my arms off when his weight hit them, but I held on and ground my teeth together. His thrashings didn't help, but I put up with those too, and his hand finally found the railing and got enough of a grip that I could ease off on the cane and help pull him back up.

It was a long time before either of us had anything to say, and it was the kid that talked first.

"You saved my life," he said.

"It happens," I said. "I even gave a bum a quarter once."

"Why? Why didn't you let me go?"

I'd been a sucker twice in one night, and I wasn't all that happy with myself. "So they can hang you, Wayne. For killing your father and for killing that black-mailer in the alley."

His voice was suddenly calm. "I'm not ever gonna see again, am I?" He was huddled against the wall of the tower, well away from the gas jet that continued to burn. I didn't know if the whole tower was going to go up or not, but at the moment I didn't care. I wasn't ready to crawl down that ladder just yet. Not carrying a blind killer along for ballast.

"I don't know, kid. But keep your hands off the burns." I could hear sirens, finally, coming toward the plant.

"Why'd you shoot your old man?" I asked.

"Because he laughed at me." The kid was calm as an old dog, staring away with empty eyes. "I

got the pictures back for him, by myself, and I didn't even look to see what they were. And he just laughed and told me I was stupid." He put one hand up to touch his face. The burns were bad, bad enough that I could smell charred flesh from where I sat. His skin had a dusty look to it, and I knew the blisters would be coming up before long.

"He showed me the pictures," the kid said. "He told me it was time I found out about the real world." He folded his arms and squeezed his hands in his armpits, rocking slowly back and forth. "It was like he wasn't my father anymore. Just some sick old man that I wanted dead."

"Johnson and the others," I said. "They knew about the blackmail, and they gave you a hard time about it, didn't they?"

"They never said, but they were always laughing at me. I figured it out."

The sirens had gotten to the foot of the tower. It wouldn't be much longer now.

"How did you know?" the kid finally asked. "How did you know it was me?"

I closed my eyes. "The little things. If it was somebody from the plant, they had to get in and out without the guard seeing them. You could get a key and use your father's office, and stick something in the lock of the fire-door so you could get back in. Johnson and the others had to

cover up for you because they knew about the blackmail and couldn't afford an investigation.

"Then there was the alley. When I yelled your father's name, you took off like a rabbit. You must have thought I recognized you. Only you or your father would have reacted to the name Foster like that.

"But the thing that did it for me was the car. They tell me it won't start when it's cold. But it was still warm enough last night to fire right up when you left work. That started me thinking, and the rest just fell into place.

"I came back here because there was still one picture in your father's safe. You took the time to burn the ones at the house, and I figured you might be back for this one."

Suddenly Wayne doubled up and let out a groan that was almost a scream. The shock was wearing off, and he was not going to be listening to anything for a while.

I got to my feet and looked down the ladder, and watched the firemen working their way up the tower. The lights were all around, but the darkness of the night was pressing in, hard. The sun would come up tomorrow for me and I would be rid of it, but Wayne Foster would be in the darkness for the rest of his life.

I hooked the cane over my arm and began dragging him over to the ladder for the long trip down.



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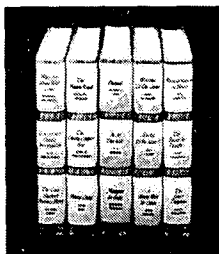
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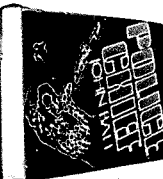
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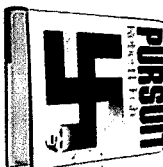
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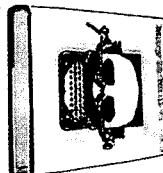
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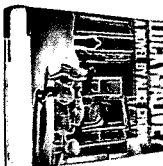
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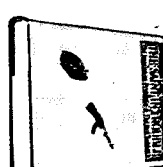
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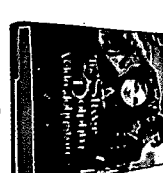
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